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Urban Studies and Planning

Fear and belonging in Kontula: negotiating difference in everyday urban encounters at an East Helsinki shopping centre

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

This master's thesis is an ethnographic study about everyday urban encounters and social interaction. It explores how residents in the suburban housing estate of Kontula in East Helsinki negotiate social and cultural difference in their everyday lives. The study focuses on the semi-public spaces of the local shopping centre and examines residents' capacity to live with difference. The study contributes to a multi-vocal and historically informed understanding of the processes that shape the social landscapes of a socially mixed and multi-ethnic neighbourhood.

The study is based on fieldwork carried out in two phases between August 2019 and February 2020. The study applies anthropological methods of participant observation and qualitative interviews. The eleven research participants are adults between the ages of 30 and 71 who live in the neighbourhood and have extensive personal experience of the shopping centre. Although the interviews were a crucial aspect of the meaning-making process, the study relies primarily on participant observation in constructing an interpretation and analysis of social interaction at an intimate scale.

In order to contextualise everyday encounters at the shopping centre, this thesis assesses how Kontula, as a stigmatised territory in the urban margins, encapsulates a complex interplay between moral claims of a "good" and "bad" neighbourhood. While some residents confirm negative stereotypes about the shopping centre and bring attention to local social problems and issues of unsafety, others downplay these problems and instead emphasise how tolerant and sociable the shopping centre is. Observations of stigmatised territories reveal how the participation of marginalised individuals and ethnic minorities at the shopping centre challenges the processes and discourses that constitute them as objects of fear and nuisance.

The concepts of conviviality and cosmopolitan canopies are used to analyse local social interactions. The analysis suggests that the capacity to live with difference is enabled by ordinary meeting places, such as pubs and cafés, where residents come into regular social contact and engage with diverse individuals and groups. While the maintenance of ethnic boundaries remains salient in the way residents negotiate the social landscapes, these ordinary spaces of encounter situationally reconfigure categories of "us" and "them" and thus expand local meanings of who belongs. The analysis concludes that the contested meanings of belonging and the everyday negotiation of difference are attributes of an open multi-ethnic society coming to terms with difference and change. The analysis suggests that an equal right to participate and interact in shared urban spaces, rather than community consensus, is the hallmark of a society's capacity to live with difference.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords

Kontula, social interaction, ethnicity, boundaries, marginalisation, belonging, stigma, territorial stigma, conviviality, cosmopolitanism, ethnography

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan arkisia kohtaamisia ja sosiaalista vuorovaikutusta helsinkiläisessä lähiössä. Tutkimus käsittelee, kuinka Kontulan lähiön asukkaat kohtaavat sosiaalista ja kulttuurillista erilaisuutta arkielämässään. Tutkimuksessa keskitytään Kontulan ostoskeskuksen puolijulkisiin tiloihin ja tarkastellaan asukkaiden kykyä sopeutua sekä kohdata erilaisuutta. Työ osallistuu lähiötutkimuksen tieteelliseen keskusteluun tuomalla esiin moniäänisen ja paikallishistoriaan nojautuvan käsityksen niistä prosesseista, jotka muovaavat etnisesti ja sosiaalisesti moninaista naapurustoa.

Tutkimus perustuu etnografiseen kenttätyöhön, joka suoritettiin kahdessa osassa elokuun 2019 ja helmikuun 2020 välillä. Työssä sovelletaan osallistuvan havainnoinnin ja laadullisen haastattelun menetelmiä. Tutkimuksen yksitoista haastateltavaa ovat aikuisia 30 ja 71 ikävuoden väliltä. Haastateltavat asuvat Kontulassa, ja heillä on laaja kokemuspohja ostoskeskuksen arjesta. Vaikka haastatteluaineisto on tärkeä osa tutkimusta, pohjautuu työ ennen kaikkea niihin tulkintoihin ja analyysiin, jotka syntyivät osallistuvan havainnoinnin kautta ja niissä vuorovaikutustilanteissa, joista työ kertoo.

Tutkimusta taustoitetaan tarkastelemalla, kuinka Kontulan alueellinen leimautuminen synnyttää monisyisiä moraalisia tulkintoja ”hyvästä” ja ”huonosta” asuinalueesta. Kun osa asukkaista vahvistaa negatiivisten stereotypioiden todenperäisyyden ja kuvailee sosiaalisten ongelmien ja turvattomuuden kasautumista ostoskeskuksen alueella, toiset asukkaat taas vähättelevät ongelmia ja painottavat, kuinka hyväksyvä ja seurallinen paikka ostoskeskus on kaupunkitilana. Havainnoinnit ostoskeskuksen negatiivisesti leimautuneissa paikoissa osoittavat, kuinka marginalisoitujen henkilöiden ja etnisten vähemmistöjen osallistuminen paikalliseen elämään haastaa niitä prosesseja ja diskursseja, jotka asettavat nämä ryhmät pelon ja riesan kohteiksi.

Työssä hyödynnetään leppoisan rinnakkaiselon ja kosmopoliittisen suojan käsitteitä. Tuloksien pohjalta vaikuttaa siltä, että arkiset kohtaamispaikat, kuten baarit ja kahvilat, luovat mahdollisuuden kohdata erilaisuutta ja sopeutua paikalliseen moninaisuuteen. Vaikka etninen eronteko ja rajatyö edelleen määrittävät miten paikalliset suunnistavat ostoskeskuksen sosiaalisessa ympäristössä, kohtaamispaikat ajoittain uudelleenmäärittävät paikallisen kuulumisen rajaehtoja ja käytänteitä ja siten laajentavat paikallisia käsityksiä ”meistä”. Tutkimuksen johtopäätös on, että avoin ja monietninen yhteiskunta syntyy nimenomaan niistä prosesseista, joissa kuulumisen käytänteitä ja merkityksiä haastetaan. Tutkimus esittää, että yhteisön konsensuksen sijasta tasa-arvoinen oikeus osallistua yhteiseen kaupunkitilaan ja avoin arkinen vuorovaikutus ovat merkkejä yhteisön kyvystä kohdata erilaisuutta sekä sopeutua muutokseen.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords

Kontula, lähiö, sosiaalinen vuorovaikutus, etnisyys, rajatyö, marginaali, kuuluminen, stigma, alueellinen leima

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Figure 1 Kontula shopping centre in 2019. Photo: author

1. Introduction

It's less than a 10-minute walk from my apartment to the open-air shopping centre in Kontula. Here in the eastern periphery of Helsinki, the suburban housing estate spreads out over wide green spaces and patches of forest. Large, white apartment blocks line up along the roads. On a typical autumn afternoon the streets are mostly empty and quiet. In the distance I can hear the metro whooshing by. It's an 18-minute ride to the city centre. As I get nearer to the shopping centre, there are more people walking on the street. The main road that cuts through the neighbourhood is busy with traffic. A passing car blares out what sounds like Bangla pop music. I walk through an underpass with large, colourful murals on the walls painted by a women's street art collective. The streetlamps are covered with stickers. One of them reads, 'Refugees welcome'.

At the entrance to the metro station, a small group of drug users are huddled in a circle rolling cigarettes, some of them possibly clients of the local low-threshold service centre. Next to them is a line of taxicabs and abandoned shopping carts. Some teenagers are hanging out in front of the kiosk inside the station. A security guard stands observing a few steps away. Estonian construction workers from the nearby infill development site return to work from their shish kebab lunch. Senior citizens stroll along the main thoroughfare, making their daily rounds of the shops and cafés and stopping to chat with neighbours and acquaintances on the street. There is a characteristic buzz of activity as people go about their everyday routines.

While the old shopping centre has long been the heart of the surrounding neighbourhoods, more recently the area has become known as a distinctly multicultural place that attracts both entrepreneurs and customers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. There are Chinese, Bengali, Uzbek and Iraqi restaurants, as well as numerous shish kebab and pizza restaurants owned by Turks, Kurds and Afghanis. Many of the recently opened barber shops are owned by Iraqi immigrants. There are ethnic grocery shops and halal meat shops, and practically all of the pubs are operated by either Bengali, Turkish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian, Congolese, Syrian or Lebanese owners and employees. The growing number of immigrant-owned businesses has substantially diversified the regular clientele, especially during the past 10 years, and contributed to the shopping centre's transformation into a lively hub of both commercial and cultural activity. While many residents use the shopping centre primarily as a thoroughfare for catching the metro or shopping for groceries, for other residents it is the focal point of their everyday lives, a place of belonging where they can connect with others. In fact, some residents say they hardly ever leave the neighbourhood unless they have to.

My time spent at the shopping centre, both as a resident and a student of urban ethnography, has revealed how the rapid social changes happening in Kontula connect the neighbourhood to national and global processes of urbanisation and human migration. While there is nothing particularly unique or new in the processes that are now shaping the neighbourhood when compared to other cities and other studies done in the past, the vantage point of experiencing these changes in one's own neighbourhood does provide the opportunity to pay close attention to how everyday life and the local context inform an understanding of these global processes. Furthermore, the sharply polarised public debate surrounding issues of immigration and asylum seekers raises

questions about what is actually going on in the neighbourhoods that are becoming diversified and how well are newcomers integrating into local communities.

The purpose of this master's thesis is to explore the everyday social worlds of a culturally diverse neighbourhood – the meeting places and activities where residents are exposed to difference – and interpret how the social and historical context of the neighbourhood informs an understanding of the processes that shape these encounters. In other words, how is difference negotiated by regular people in their everyday lives? A negotiation is a dialogue or interactive process between people who have a mutual interest in coming to some form of agreement over a matter in which there is potential for conflict – in this case, the mutual interest is *belonging*.

1.1 Research questions and perspective of the study

What follows is an ethnographic study of everyday urban encounters and social interaction. The study focuses on the public and semi-public spaces of Kontula's shopping centre and examines residents' capacity to live with social and cultural difference. It is a historically situated exploration of diversity at an intimate scale, with the aim of highlighting the processes that shape a socially mixed and multi-ethnic neighbourhood.

The primary research question in this thesis is, "How do residents from diverse social and cultural backgrounds negotiate difference in Kontula?" While most studies of multi-ethnic housing estates find conflict and antagonism within ethnically diverse communities and focus on the ways in which residents construct social and ethnic boundaries, this study explores how practices of inclusion and belonging blur ethnic boundaries and expand local meanings of who belongs. To answer the primary research question, the following secondary research questions are used to guide the analysis:

(1) How does urban marginalisation inform a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood?
(2) To what extent is everyday social contact at the shopping centre significant to cosmopolitan formations?

I argue that the capacity to live with difference is enabled by ordinary and informal meeting places where residents are regularly exposed to social and cultural diversity. In these spaces of social interaction, both conflict and conviviality are ever present possibilities of mundane encounters. Local meanings of belonging are contested and informed by conflicting experiences and narratives about the public spaces of the neighbourhood. At the shopping centre where residents from diverse backgrounds feel an equal right to participate and interact with others, the ordinary spaces of encounter open the possibility for new and varied forms of belonging. This thesis therefore argues that the capacity to accommodate the tension of difference, rather than the achievement of community consensus, is crucial to the formation of cosmopolitan publics and an ethos of urban civility. The negotiation itself, rather than a definitive outcome, is how residents accommodate difference and learn to "get along".

The aim of using ethnographic methods of research is to render perspectival knowledge of the field that is characterised by a multiplicity of voices. The constructed meanings and narratives that are assembled in this thesis do not represent any particular group of people, nor do I claim to portray a representative "local's point of view". Instead, I aim to provide an interpretive reading of the changing social landscape that is grounded in participant observation and a theoretical commitment to uncovering the social processes at play.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

In chapter 2 I provide historical and demographic context for the study of a suburban housing estate in Helsinki. I also introduce several key concepts that I apply in the analysis. These concepts provide a theoretical framework for this thesis and I will refer back to these theories throughout the analysis.

In chapter 3 I describe my methodology as well as unpack some crucial theoretical underpinnings related to the ethnographic method. Chapter 3 also contains a description of the interview data and participants. I explain how these interviews were conducted and how I found the participants. I then discuss the scope of this study, its limitations, as well as the ethical considerations involved in the process of doing fieldwork.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide the main substance of both my analysis and discussion. In both chapters I unpack the ethnographic data while at the same time construct an

analysis and discussion. Due to the nature of my ethnographic data that relies heavily on participant observations and interpretation, I felt it was necessary to intertwine my discussion within these two chapters instead of having a separate chapter assigned for it. By combining the theoretical analysis and discussion with the description of my ethnographic data I intend to provide a more transparent account of how I came to make certain observations and why I arrived at particular conclusions instead of others. Chapter 4 focuses on the context of social practices and encounters at the shopping centre, highlighting the social and historical processes that give meaning(s) to local public and semi-public spaces and a sense of belonging. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the social interactions I observed at the shopping centre and how these are significant to cosmopolitan formations.

Finally, in chapter 6 I summarize my ethnographic evidence and argue how my analysis answers the research questions. I then provide a synthesis of how these conclusions contribute to the existing scholarly understanding of the topics discussed. I end chapter 6 by reflecting on the role of ethnographic knowledge in supplementing our understanding of the city, and how perspectives discussed in this thesis raise important questions for urban planning and research.

Figure 2 A map of the shopping centre, 2019. Photo: author

2. Constructing the field

> *'Anyone who has done fieldwork, or studied the phenomenon, knows that one does not just wander onto a "field site" to engage in a deep and meaningful relationship with "the natives." "The field" is a clearing whose deceptive transparency obscures the complex processes that go into constructing it.'*
>
> (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 105)

In this chapter I outline the conceptual framework that forms the foundation to my ethnographic observations in Kontula. I show where my ideas are coming from and how these ideas inform a particular kind of understanding of urban social interaction. I begin by briefly contextualising my field site in the history of suburban housing estates in Helsinki and describe the structural processes that have been pivotal in urban studies discussions in Finland. After this I introduce the key concepts that I apply in my analysis. This chapter is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of the current state of theory and research on these topics, but rather, it is an introduction to the analytical tools which I use and elaborate on in chapters 4 and 5. Furthermore, my primary aim is to demonstrate the overlap between the following ideas.

2.1 The ethnographic site

The chief ethnographic site of this thesis is an open-air shopping centre located in the suburban housing estate of Kontula, in East Helsinki. Kontula has a population of approximately 14 300 residents, and the neighbourhood is situated in the Mellunkylä district with a total population of 39 000 residents (Tilastokeskus 2019). Kontula's shopping centre, which was built in 1967, forms the heart of the neighbourhood and is the largest open-air shopping centre in Finland, with over 80 business premises accessible within a network of pedestrian alleyways (see Figure 2). The adjacent Kontula metro station logs over 20 000 daily passengers on average, which ensures a steady stream of people in the shopping centre throughout the day (Helsinki 2019). In recent years the shopping centre has become a multicultural hub due to the large number of shops and restaurants owned by first-generation immigrants. The shopping centre buildings are in a bad condition and there are plans under way for an extensive renovation. The renovation of the shopping centre is a contested issue: some residents

and local activists are afraid that the renovation will gentrify the neighbourhood, pushing vulnerable section of the population and small businesses away from the area.

Apart from restaurants, supermarkets and other small businesses, the shopping centre also houses several small community and social centres, a youth centre, a library, a low-threshold service centre, a health station, a swimming pool, a church and a mosque. The wide range of services offered at the shopping centre means that residents find most of their everyday needs in the neighbourhood.

Figure 3 Kontula shopping centre viewed from the west, 2021. Photo: Pertti Ylikojola.

Kontula, like many of Helsinki's suburban housing estates, was built in the 1960s to accommodate a mass migration from rural to urban areas in Finland. During this time of rapid urbanisation, residents moving into the new housing estates essentially formed working-class reserves that supplied labour force to the city's burgeoning industries (Kortteinen 1982). Large new residential areas were built on inexpensive and largely

unused forest land along the city borders, especially in the eastern periphery of Helsinki. Nearly 20 per cent of Helsinki's housing stock was built during this time (Vaattovaara et al. 2010). Kontula represents a fairly typical housing estate in Helsinki as it consists of a mix of both owner-occupancy and rental housing, although there is a relatively large proportion of state subsidised social housing (26%) when compared to rest of Helsinki (18%) (Helsinki 2011 & Helsinki 2020b). The mixing of tenure types in the large housing estates was part of the city's urban policy of spatial social mixing as a preventative measure against residential segregation and social disorder (Vaattovaara et al. 2018). The bulk of the housing comprises of apartment blocks and high-rise towers, although there are some smaller pockets of single-family detached housing and row housing.

Since the very first years of the newly constructed neighbourhood the media was influential in portraying Kontula in a negative light (Kokkonen 2002; Roivainen 1999). Newspapers and TV programmes focused on the social problems in the area, highlighting incidents of violence among local youth gangs, alcoholism, drug use and poor quality of construction. Although there existed and still exists undeniable problems related to crime and child welfare, some residents have felt that there was a consistent effort to exaggerate these problems, which led to an irreparable blemishing of the neighbourhoods' reputation (Kokkonen 2002). This disparagement of the neighbourhood and its residents was disproportionally focused on Kontula, despite there being little socio-economic indication that Kontula in the 1970s was any different from other housing estates in Helsinki that in turn were not subjected to such a degree of negative stereotyping (Tuominen 2020). Negative stereotypes of the neighbourhood as a "problem area" or "ghetto" persist today, both in media representations as well as in the everyday vernacular. The neighbourhood's bad reputation is consequently internalised by residents and informs the ways in which residents experience the relative location of Kontula and its hierarchical position in relation to other places in the city (ibid).

During the 1990s economic depression and the rapid growth of the ICT sector that followed, large housing estates such as Kontula began to decline socio-economically (Kortteinen & Vaattovaara 2015; Vaattovaara & Kortteinen 2003; Vaattovaara et al. 2018). The socio-economic differentiation of neighbourhoods in Helsinki revealed patterns of residential segregation: the wealthier and more educated residents concentrated in the city centre and areas west of the city, whereas poorer residents were concentrated in the large housing estates in the east. The 1990s

depression was one of the worst economic crises in Finland's history and it had severe consequences in working-class neighbourhoods such as Kontula. While prior to 1990 Kontula had a near full employment rate, during the depression in 1996 unemployment reached 24,9 per cent (Kokkonen 2002: 165). As the job market changed after the depression due the restructuring of the economy, there were significantly fewer jobs for unskilled labour and consequently an increase in long-term unemployment in the area. Furthermore, studies suggested that a part of the middle class was moving out of the large housing estates (Vilkama, Vaattovaara & Dhalmann 2013). Survey studies revealed that the primary reasons for moving away included local social conditions, feelings of unsafety, the neighbourhood's bad reputation, and the growing number of immigrants in the area (ibid). These factors led to Kontula becoming increasingly marginalised in the sociospatial orientation of the city (Tuominen 2020).

From the depression years of the 1990s onwards there was a significant increase of immigration into Finland and many of the migrants settled in the same housing estates suffering from the consequences of the depression (Vaattovaara et al. 2010; Vilkama 2011). The majority of immigrants came from Russia, Estonia, and Somalia. Prejudice toward immigrants was rampant at the turn of the millennium and many of the local ethnic Finns felt that too many foreigners were concentrated in working-class areas like Kontula (Kokkonen 2002: 168). Racism and discrimination in public spaces, schools and in workplaces was a common experience among ethnic minorities during this time (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind & Vesala 2002). Nevertheless, as social contact between Finns and immigrants gradually grew, attitudes began to change and immigrants began working and opening businesses at the local shopping centre, thus increasing their integration into the neighbourhood community (Kokkonen 2002).

At the time of conducting my own research in Kontula, cultural diversity was a distinctive characteristic of life in the neighbourhood. In 2019, the portion of foreign language speakers in Mellunkylä district was 31% compared to the Helsinki average of 15.7% (Helsinki 2020a). The three largest foreign language groups were Russian, Estonian and Somali. Ethnic minorities in Kontula represent a very diverse group. Some researchers use the term 'super-diversity' to describe the cultural, religious and political complexity in which residents of housing estates such as Kontula live in today (Huttunen & Juntunen 2020). While the majority of immigrants have emigrated to Finland only recently as adults, others have moved to Finland as a child, while still others are native born (Saukkonen 2020). The reasons for emigration are equally varied

and there exists significant cultural, social, educational, political and ideological differentiation within migrant groups. The migrant experience is furthermore impacted by such social factors as class and gender (Isotalo 2016; Ojanen 2018). Consequently, residents with migrant background do not fall neatly into ethnic categories that could adequately describe their identity (Huttunen & Juntunen 2020: 4126). It is therefore impossible to make any generalising observations of immigrants or the immigrant experience in Kontula.

Within this context of growing social and cultural diversity in Kontula, the shopping centre sets the stage for everyday urban encounters in which people from different backgrounds interact and negotiate inclusion and a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood. In this chapter, I have so far contextualised local social life in the historical processes in which the neighbourhood has been moulded. In order to understand the nature of these encounters we must now turn to several central concepts in which my analysis is grounded.

2.2 Urban marginalisation and territorial stigma

Any analysis of everyday social interactions at the shopping centre must begin with understanding ways in which territorial stigma informs the meanings attached to local urban spaces. These processes are significant for this study because stigmatisation influences not only the way residents narrate their experiences of neighbourhood, but also the way that they navigate in public spaces, and ultimately, the way that they interact with other residents.

As mentioned in the previous section, Kontula suffers from a bad reputation that seems to be primarily the result of consistent negative coverage in the media since the 1970s coupled with processes of urban marginalisation. The role of newspapers in creating and sustaining a negative image and reputation for particular housing estates is well documented (E.g., Kearns, Kearns & Lawson 2013). The regular coverage and mention of a housing estate in negative stories about social, poverty and housing issues construct '*distinct dominant narratives* for use by the press' (ibid: 594, original emphasis). As a result, Kontula has become tainted as the symbol of urban social problems, and more recently, the failed integration of immigrants in Helsinki

(Tuominen 2020). This spatially defined denigration of an urban territory is known in urban research as territorial stigmatisation.

The pioneering work of Erving Goffman (1963) on stigma laid out the foundation for understanding how negative moral judgement is attached to particular people based on their physical characteristics, group membership, or their individual character. Stigmatisation is the social process by which these negative or socially deviant meanings stick to individuals, and consequently they are 'disqualified from full social acceptance' (ibid: 9). Stigma is thus a social blemish whose meaning is based on the historical context and culturally specific beliefs by which others view particular attributes flawed or discrediting. Goffman was particularly interested with the issue of 'mixed contacts', in which stigmatized persons and 'normals' are in immediate physical presence of each other and how the anticipation of these contacts may lead to individuals arranging their life so as to avoid them (ibid: 23). As we shall later see, Kontula's shopping centre as a public space is the site of 'mixed contacts' and this affects how some residents anticipate frightening or disturbing encounters with people perceived to possess blemishing qualities.

Loïc Wacquant (2007, 2008) applies Goffman's ideas of stigma in an analysis of how specific places and neighbourhoods, particularly those inhabited by ethnic minorities and the urban poor, are stigmatised as a top-down institutionalised process. What emerges are 'zones reserved for the urban outcasts' (2007: 68). Wacquant argues that whether or not these areas are in fact dilapidated and dangerous matters little, as the real-life consequences of vilification are experienced by residents in the form of prejudice as well as social and economic exclusion. Where Goffman interpreted the ways in which stigma is attached onto bodies, Wacquant illustrates how urban space can act as the marker of discredit. He furthermore argues that territorial stigma is superimposed on the already existing stigmata associated with poverty and ethnic identity (Wacquant 2008: 238).

Research into territorial stigmatisation has more recently focused on stigma management strategies and how individuals respond to stigma in various context specific ways. While Wacquant argues that residents internalise stigma, other researchers have illustrated how residents reject or even actively resist stigmatisation and the reputation of the "bad" neighbourhood circulated by outsiders (Jensen, Prieur & Skjott-Larsen 2021; Junnilainen 2020; Kusenbach 2020; Watt 2020). It is important to distinguish here that reputation is a transmission process of a belief that can result in

negative or positive beliefs; stigma is a social interactive process with only negative consequences on the person subjected to stigma (Kearns, Kearns & Lawson 2013: 582).

Past research has also shown that for many of those who occupy the urban margins, such as the poor, the elderly, the youth and the immigrants, the local world of the neighbourhood is a place where they are highly attached and invested (Hall 2012: 96; van Eijk 2010). This is a significant observation because the impetus of stigma and social marginalisation attached to both the neighbourhood and its people makes it difficult for individuals to feel comfortable about leaving an area of familiarity (ibid: 100). Suzanne Hall therefore argues that stigma creates both attachment and detachment to physical places (ibid). In this thesis, we shall see how these processes result in particular semi-public spaces in Kontula becoming both spaces of fear and avoidance as well as spaces of familiarity and belonging.

2.3 Belonging as social practice

The scholarship on belonging in urban contexts has theorized ways in which social groups and collectives as well as place-bound identities inform a sense of belonging among residents. In urban sociology, belonging is often considered a factor in engendering social cohesion in society. Despite the increasing social complexity of the modern, globalized and digitized cities, and the elaborate patterns in which people associate with others transnationally (Sassen 2007), localized place-bound forms of belonging have endured as an aspect of everyday urban life (Blokland 2017; Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst 2004).

Some scholars emphasize how belonging is an ongoing process that is achieved through everyday practices, rather than by virtue of categorical membership in a group (Garbutt 2009: 88). In other words, simply being a "local", as in, living in a particular neighbourhood, does not automatically translate to experiences of belonging in that neighbourhood. Rather, belonging emerges through social participation and engagement in local social life. Belonging, from this perspective, is both the experience of 'being part of the social fabric' as well as the daily routines and practices that inform and re-enforce this experience (ibid). Belonging is therefore something that can be empirically observed and recorded, and it is something that can take on a variety of changing and context specific forms and meanings.

Belonging as a social practice or performance then requires a social space in which to operate, a context in which people find engagement through shared practices and meanings. Particular public urban spaces may thus become known as "comfort zones" through public familiarity and a perceived local atmosphere (Blokland & Nash 2014: 1143-1144). Urban spaces in which people experience belonging are therefore not only abstract entities such as the "neighbourhood" but may be found in specific physical locations to which residents attribute positive meanings.

As modern cities have become increasingly diverse through human migration, economic stratification and social fragmentation, local forms of belonging have likewise become more dynamic and contested (Blokland 2017: 2). The politics of belonging is consequently negotiated in everyday social encounters and power relations: who is included and excluded from the local practices of belonging? Which practices are considered legitimate, and which are considered discrediting? Furthermore, as public spaces are transformed through urban development projects and transnational capital investment practices, the loss of formerly familiar "comfort zones" result in a loss of belonging and social engagement (E.g., Mäenpää & Harjunen 2015).

2.4 Ethnicity and ethnic boundaries

With the continued influx of labour migrants and refugees to Finland, issues related to immigration and asylum seekers have taken centre stage in national politics especially since the 1990s. The polarised public debate is evident in the way that issues of national identity and cultural integration are echoed frequently in everyday conversations in neighbourhoods, such as Kontula, where residents come into contact with cultural difference. While at the national level the political discussion is saturated with the use of the terms "immigrant" and "foreigner" to describe virtually all non-white persons living in Finland, at the local neighbourhood level it is more common to observe residents identify and classify individuals and groups with ethnic or national labels, such as "Russian", "Somali", "Estonian" and "Finn". In the context of everyday social encounters, residents often find the need to account for and make sense of the social and cultural complexity that surrounds them. Ethnic classification is a tool, albeit an imperfect one, to cope with these challenges, and to a great extent this is 'where ethnicity is created and re-created' (Eriksen 1994: 1).

Anthropologists today typically view ethnicity as a product of social processes; a social construct, born out of the interaction between groups who construct and maintain boundaries between themselves and others (Banks 1996; Barth 1969; Eriksen 1994). This approach is known as constructivism. Understanding ethnicity in this way allows anthropologists to account for the change and ambiguity, and the processual nature and complexity of ethnic identities (Eriksen 1994: 13). Rather than viewing ethnic groups as isolated, homogenous and static entities, anthropologists depict the way categories of "us" and "them" and processes of inclusion and exclusion are continuously contested and negotiated in variable social situations. The flexible and processual nature of ethnic boundaries also helps to explain why ethnic distinctions persist over time despite inter-ethnic contact, and do not lead to its liquidation or assimilation through change (Barth 1969: 10).

Ethnic boundaries are displayed in situations in which ethnic categories of "us" and "them" coincide with behavioural responses, such as of connecting and distancing (Wimmer 2008: 975). The concept of boundary does not imply that the world consists of clear-cut and sharply divided groups (ibid). In practice boundaries of "us" and "them" are fuzzy and flexible, and individuals often maintain membership in several categories and may switch between them situationally (ibid). In contexts, such as Kontula's shopping centre, where residents confront difference on a daily basis, we shall see how ethnic categories are regularly superimposed by other group memberships and thus ethnic boundaries may at times lose relevance as a demarcation between groups of people. While the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories and the racialised processes of inclusion and exclusion are highly relevant to the subject matter of this thesis, the way I approach ethnic boundaries is with the aim of understanding contexts and social practices that challenge and blur ethnic boundaries, and how categories of "us" and "them" are situationally re-configured in social encounters.

It is often noted that in segregated neighbourhoods that are economically marginalised and socially stigmatised, social deprivation may fuel resentment and exacerbate ethnic tensions (Amin 2002). Competition for limited resources, such as jobs and affordable housing, may lead to jealousy and aggression (ibid: 962). Ash Amin argues that these factors are often ignored in favour of cultural explanations for ethnic conflict in housing estates (ibid). He furthermore notes that it is typically working-class neighbourhoods with large public housing schemes which in practice are 'asked to do all the mixing', while middle-class areas remain largely ethnically homogenous and

exclusive (ibid: 968). Amin argues that the prosaic negotiations and transgressions that take place within public spaces such as 'cafés, parks, streets, shopping malls, and squares' people develop 'an urban civic culture' (ibid: 967). In these spaces there is potential for people from different backgrounds to take part in shared practices and activities that disrupt easy labelling of others as enemies and thus initiate new attachments and patterns of social interaction (ibid: 970). While habitual cross-cultural engagement in Kontula is therefore no guarantor that people will get along without conflict, it does offer individuals the chance to question and negotiate essentialized notions of cultural identity.

Ethnicity and ethnic boundaries are useful concepts to explain the way that residents respond to cultural difference and the way they apply ethnic categories to themselves and others, but it does not fully explain the way exclusion and power relations are constructed based on phenotypical features. The categorisation of people based on their physical characteristics, such as skin colour, and using this group membership as a characteristic that defines an individual and explains their actions is called racialisation (Zacheus et al. 2019: 82). Racism is therefore the prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion experienced by individuals based on their perceived membership in a racialised category. In this thesis there are numerous examples in which individuals are categorised by residents primarily according to their skin colour and narratives in which residents describe experiencing social exclusion and prejudice based on their phenotypical features. These examples illustrate the way that ethnicity and race define power relations between people and the way that individuals experience public spaces in the city. It is important to be explicit about racism and the racialisation of individuals when analysing how residents experience being targeted in particular types of encounters, and to not dilute meanings by discussing them as cultural differences.

There is, furthermore, the issue of how to write about ethnicity and race without essentialising and normalising racialised categories. Ethnicity and race are "real" in the sense that they manifest in the societal and everyday power structures, interactions and the experience of public space. To make the processes of racialisation and ethnic marginalisation discernible, this thesis therefore makes explicit use of ethnic labels to describe individuals and groups. This is done at the risk of contributing to the very problems the study seeks to describe, as there does not exist a neutral terminology or

way of discussing race that could avoid the unequal power relations in which the discourse is embedded.

2.5 Cosmopolitanism, conviviality and agonistic urban spaces

In analysing how people engage and negotiate difference, scholars often apply the concept of cosmopolitanism to describe the ethic of civility observed in places of habitual multi-ethnic encounters. An anthropological approach to cosmopolitanism is concerned with the everyday practices and modes of living with difference, and the urban spaces and settings that accommodate cultural pluralism. Cosmopolitanism is essentially an openness to engage with divergent cultural experiences and a capacity to tolerate contrasts and difference (Hannerz 2007: 70). It also implies a cultivated skill and competence to manoeuvre in cultures other than one's own and to adapt to 'crossing the boundaries between the familiar and unfamiliar' (Hall 2012: 6).

Cosmopolitanism is also understood as an arena of contested politics, as it stands against nationalist conceptions of citizenship and belonging. Whereas the 'imagined communities' of nationalism implies identification with an exclusive national identity (Anderson 1983), cosmopolitanism refers to practices of inclusion and solidarity that extend beyond perceived ethnic or national boundaries (Khoo 2014). Hence, cosmopolitanism is said to represent 'the loosening of the hyphen between nation and state', revealing 'postnational' social formations and new citizenship claims from below (Cheah 1998: 22, 32-33). Returning to the previous discussion on the concept of belonging; cosmopolitanism is considered to describe more inclusive forms of belonging compared to the rigid and exclusionary forms of belonging offered by nationalism. This is one reason why migrants and refugees often feel more rooted in cities and in specific neighbourhoods rather than the countries where they settle (Werbner 2014: 315). In some contexts, this inclusive sense of belonging develops into a 'transethnic localism'; a counterculture that undermines the legitimacy of ethnic or national boundaries in defining membership in local social groups (Wimmer 2008: 989).

The term 'conviviality' is used to describe the spontaneous everyday practices of living together specifically in contexts where the convergence of diversity is the result of urbanisation and mass immigration. The term was first introduced by Paul Gilroy

(2004), when he discussed the social patterns in which metropolitan groups live in close proximity, 'but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not [. . .] add up to discontinuities of experience or insurmountable problems of communication' (Gilroy 2006: 40). Gilroy notes how in convivial interaction ethnic differences become ordinary and unremarkable, and how the exposure to otherness cultivates cosmopolitan formations (ibid).

This is not to say that cosmopolitanism is a pregiven in places where people from different backgrounds converge, nor does conviviality imply the absence of racism (Amin 2002; Back, Sinha, Bryan 2018; Gilroy 2006; Hall 2012). Fear and hostility are always potential outcomes of living in proximity with cultural difference. In public spaces where a diversity of people experience equal access to participate and engage in local life, the negotiation of difference is predicated by an 'agonistic' political culture (Amin 2002: 973). In agonistic public spaces different publics are in an open dialogue with each other. In Kontula, this perspective is useful in conceptualising the way exclusionary notions of belonging are contested by marginalised individuals and groups. This analytical framework is inspired by the work of Chantal Mouffe (2000) who argues that agonistic pluralism does not necessitate the achievement of consensus between different publics, but rather it describes a condition in which a multiplicity of conflicting voices and perspectives emerge and participate. Mouffe's ideas have been used to envision urban public spaces as arenas, where multiple and often marginalised publics participate and potentially challenge the hegemony of dominant groups (Björgvinsson, Ehn & Hillgren 2012). This acceptance of pluralism gives a positive status to difference and the controversies and dilemmas between contesting publics.

2.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have introduced the ethnographic site and outlined the concepts and theories that I apply in the following analysis. I have preliminarily examined how territorial stigma affects the way residents form attachment and detachment to physical places and how urban marginalisation informs a sense of belonging. I have discussed how belonging is formed through social practices and participation, and how ethnic boundaries are both constructed and blurred in everyday encounters. Finally, I have introduced the ideas of cosmopolitanism and conviviality, and discussed how public spaces are arenas where the question of who belongs is contested.

3. Methodology

Before beginning to work on this master's thesis I had the opportunity to do an internship at the City Executive Office in autumn of 2019. As part of the housing department's efforts to gather information that could be used for an urban development project in Kontula, I carried out ethnographic research at the shopping centre for three months. I conducted a number of interviews with residents and civil servants and produced a 30-page report detailing the significance of local social spaces for the neighbourhood community. I also described issues related to social problems at the shopping centre and discussed how cultural diversity has become a defining characteristic of the shopping centre. After completing the internship, I reformulated my research questions and carried out additional fieldwork for my master's thesis in January and February of 2020.

Below is a description of the research methods I applied during my fieldwork in Kontula. I also reflect on the nature of ethnographic analysis and how my position as a research intern working for the city of Helsinki possibly affected my research data.

3.1 Participant observation and ethnographic fieldnotes

In accordance with the ethnographic tradition in social anthropology, my analysis is grounded in participant observation. In this study the research methods boiled down to three essential activities: spending extended periods of time observing people in public and semi-public spaces, engaging strangers in conversation, and writing fieldnotes. The aim of these activities was to experience and describe the social interactions of people at the shopping centre, and the contested meanings particular urban spaces and activities entail. Although I had lived in the neighbourhood for seven years prior to starting my fieldwork, I still needed to break out of my routine habits and practices in order to immerse myself in local activities and make myself more approachable to other residents. If anything, the fieldwork I conducted at the shopping centre taught me how narrow and shallow my previous experience and understanding of the neighbourhood was. Reflecting on how my knowledge and perspective of the neighbourhood changed over time was crucial to the development of my analysis.

The practice of observing informal social interactions was a practical and easy method of investigation in a setting where there are numerous cafés, restaurants, pubs and community spaces, and a near constant bustle of people walking in and out of shops and the metro station. In addition, I found that it was very rare for people who spent time at the shopping centre to be reserved or reluctant to chat. While at times I would merely sit at a chosen spot and observe situations unfold around me, at other times I took a more active role by participating in local meetings and by engaging people in conversation. Whenever I talked to a resident with the intent of gathering material for fieldnotes, I would let them know that I was conducting research. It was a surprise to me how rarely this was perceived as off-putting, and to the contrary, most residents I conversed with were happy to talk about the neighbourhood and even about their personal lives. It became apparent how a large portion of people at the shopping centre on any given day were primarily there to socialise and interact with other residents. I did find that being a local resident was to my advantage as far as building initial rapport with people. I was often asked whether I lived in the neighbourhood and it seemed to matter especially for younger adults.

I chose not to write any fieldnotes while I was observing ongoing events and interactions. I was wary of the way others around me would react to this unusual activity and I was afraid they would find me suspicious. I also felt that the act of writing was detrimental to full immersion and that I would no longer be a participant but more of an outside observer (Cf. Emerson 2012: 357). Instead, I focused my attention to remembering details and made mental notes of situations I observed; for instance, who said what and to whom, in what context, and what was their expression and tone of voice. After a significant event transpired, I would retire to a quieter place and write everything down free form into a notebook. These were jotted notes with key words and phrases that could later be used to jog my memory and re-call what happened when reconstructing a more detailed written record. Such day-to-day jottings were raw and messy observations, and generally void of analysis and self-reflection.

Once I arrived back home, I wrote a more detailed account of the day's events. Emerson et al. (2012: 361-362) suggest that the purpose of writing a more detailed fieldnote is that it provides the ethnographer an opportunity to reflect more critically on initial impressions, and thus develop a more nuanced interpretation and analysis of previously observed experiences. I divided these reflections and insights according to themes and places. While most fieldnotes were detailed re-constructions of particular

conversations or descriptions of the social environment, I occasional wrote analytic notes on methodological insights and on potential theoretical connections. Most of the time in my writing I was stating the obvious while every now and then I was inspired to probe more far-fetched ideas. The fieldnotes written during this time were very much open-ended, inconsistent and experimentative. In this manner I compiled a detailed record of my day-to-day observations while at the same time developing analytical material that could potentially be used in the final polished account recorded in this thesis.

3.2 Interviews and participants

Interviews are an important aspect of the meaning-making process during fieldwork. With qualitative interviews, the ethnographer engages the research subjects in a 'co-construction of knowledge' (Heyl 2002: 370). The aim of interviews is to pursue subjective information about the participants' personal lives and to discover how they create meaning of their experiences. Ideally, the participant teaches the researcher and helps them understand their particular point of view within the cultural context. This knowledge then supplements further investigation in the field and can be compared with the data from other interviews. This kind of process produces by its very nature *perspectival knowledge* of the field that is characterised by a multiplicity of voices. It is up to the ethnographer to construct meaning from the data, by privileging particular voices and positions, and situating them in a historical and socio-cultural context. Analysing interview data is therefore a constructivist process that is deeply affected by the researcher's own positioning and embedded personal values.

During my fieldwork in Kontula I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with 11 residents. In semi-structured interviews the same set of open-ended questions are used in all interviews, but the order may change, and the interview unfolds in a conversational and interactive manner (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010). During my internship I additionally conducted two interviews with municipal employees who work in the neighbourhood. The interviews lasted on average one hour and were recorded with the permission of the participants. Two of the interviews had two simultaneous participants and one key informant was interviewed on two separate occasions. All of the

participants were anonymised. I supplemented the interviews with a number of informal conversations in the field.

The age of interviewees ranged between 30 and 71. There were eight self-identified men and three women. All of the residents I interviewed had lived in the neighbourhood a minimum of five years and several of them had either been born in Kontula or moved there as a child. I found a few participants through my social networks in the neighbourhood and the rest of the interviewees were found during the course of my fieldwork through chance encounters. My aim was to interview a diverse group of people in terms age, gender, occupation and ethnicity. I was only partially successful, as a clear majority of participants were male. There were six ethnic Finns, three Somali Finns, one Congolese Finn, and one Swedish Finn. All of the interviews were conducted in Finnish language. Some nuances of meaning may have been lost in translation, and it is unfortunate that the slang and colourful use of language by the research participants was lost in writing the thesis in English. Most interviews took place in local cafés, pubs and community spaces, while one interview was conducted at the participant's home. After each interview I would immediately write fieldnotes of my first impressions. Later, after transcribing the recording on a word processor, I colour coded themes and topics of interest.

3.3 The process of analysis and reflexive issues

As mentioned previously, the process of writing fieldnotes formed the substance of my ethnographic analysis. I compared and made connections between themes I found in the semi-structured interviews to observations made in the field. After finishing the fieldwork stage of research, I was left with a disorderly assortment of initial interpretations and analytical notes that I organised into themes. The task was then to sift through the fieldnotes and try to evaluate how best to approach my research questions. Instead of relying on a single theoretical framework that could be used to guide the analysis, and instead of attempting to do some form of empirical hypothesis-testing in which my findings would be systematically measured against existing literature, I chose to apply ideas found in literature whenever they helped to explain some pattern in my data. In this way the scope of my study changed over time and I

regularly clarified my research questions to allow the data gathered in the field to guide my analysis.

Again, it is important to acknowledge that the writing of ethnographic analysis is a creative and intuitive process, in which the ethnographer applies rhetorical strategies to construct meaning out of a complex and often contradictory set of voices and narratives from the field (Emerson et al. 2012: 364-365). In doing so, the ethnographer inevitably chooses what is significant, and in turn, what is left out. The process of analysis is therefore also a critical practice, which requires the ethnographer to pay particular attention to methodological issues and to be reflexive about their own positioning and how this may affect the data acquired.

For instance, my initial role as a research intern gathering information about the neighbourhood for the City Executive Office had a profound impact on the underlying framework of my interviews. Since I was gathering information to be used in developing the neighbourhood, there was an implicit assumption understood by everyone I interviewed, that there is, in fact, something wrong with the neighbourhood that needs to be fixed and I was there to learn what it is. As Tuominen has noted (2019), the only reasonable thing for a resident to do in this situation is to complain how horrible the neighbourhood is and to point out everything that is wrong. Any other response would risk contradicting the ethnographer and coming into conflict with them (ibid). Junnilainen has argued that in the context of stigmatised neighbourhoods, outsiders who interview residents may profoundly influence the opinions and position of the informant, and thus inadvertently propagate negative stereotypes of the neighbourhood (2019: 231-232). Residents are aware of the ways in which outsiders view their neighbourhood, and therefore, adapt their narrative of the neighborhood in order to cater to the expectations of the interlocutor and provide information that confirms their biases (ibid). It is therefore important to be mindful of how the particular circumstances of fieldwork and the broader social context condition the meaning-making process (Heyl 2007: 374). It is also crucial to supplement knowledge gathered from interviews with direct observations and to contextualize what has been said in the inherent power relations of the social field.

3.4 Scope of the study and ethical considerations

As mentioned in the introduction, the scope of this study is limited to the public and semi-public spaces of the open-air shopping centre in Kontula. As the research analysis relies heavily on participant observations, the primary unit of observation is a spatial unit rather than a focus group of carefully selected individuals. The social unit of analysis consists primarily of long-time residents who are attached to the day-to-day social activities of the shopping centre. Residents for whom the shopping centre represents a particularly important place of belonging are therefore over-represented in this study. The study is furthermore limited to the adult population.

The American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics is used as a guideline for ethical matters in this study. I have taken measures to anonymise the participants in this study by using pseudonyms and changing particular details about people and places in order to protect their privacy. Due to the nature of doing participant observations in pubs, where people are drinking alcohol and not everyone is always aware or remember that I am conducting research, I have had to take particular care in choosing what material to use in the analysis. I have omitted material of conversations and situations with individuals who due to the situation could not make an informed decision of participating in the study.

One of the major limitations of this study is the short length of time spent doing fieldwork. I rarely had the opportunity to review the material I had gathered with the research participants. This could have been a valuable way to gain new perspectives, but also a more ethically rigorous method of ethnographic research.

Now that the circumstances of this study have been thoroughly discussed, I will move on to the ethnographic analysis in the following chapter.

4. Landscapes of fear and belonging

As a neighbourhood in the urban margins of Helsinki with a history of territorial stigmatisation and a public narrative that treats the neighbourhood as a problem to be solved, Kontula encapsulates a complex interplay between moral claims of a "good" and "bad" neighbourhood. Residents are aware of the demeaning ways in which outsiders speak of Kontula, and this informs the manner in which they narrate their own experience of the neighbourhood and the way they interact with other residents. Any analysis of everyday social interactions at the shopping centre must begin with understanding the processes of stigmatisation and social marginalisation that characterise the local social landscape.

In this chapter, I unpack the dichotomy of fear and belonging in Kontula's shopping centre. I begin by illustrating how a preoccupation with the bad reputation of the neighbourhood so easily overshadows a sense of belonging and boundary-crossing sociability experienced by many of its residents. I then describe some of the ways in which social marginalisation and stigma operate at the local level and how different forms of marginality seem to spatially cluster, resulting in the focused avoidance of particular public spaces. I use a pub, which I call The Amsterdam, as an example of such a cluster. The stigma attached to this pub prompts fear and repulsion among some residents, while for others the very marginality of the pub is what attracts them to it and provides them with a space of belonging. It is in these marginal spaces where social and ethnic boundaries are negotiated through everyday social practices, and where a crucial form of transethnic localism takes root. Transethnic localism refers to the type of counterculture that undermines the legitimacy of ethnic boundaries in defining membership in local social groups. I end the chapter by discussing how the narrative of local social problems and unsafety also has a parallel and alternative narrative in which the shopping centre has recently become safer and more tolerant of people who were marginalised in the past. Understanding these underlying tensions and contradictions inherent in the local social landscape will then inform a discussion in chapter 5 of some of the ways in which residents negotiate and cope with difference and fear in daily interactions.

4.1 “Don’t exaggerate how bad it is here”

“The front of my shop is the worst area in Kontula,” Altin said one day, as he was cutting my hair. Altin’s barber shop is on the edge of the central plaza of the shopping centre. It’s a small space squeezed between a long row of similarly sized shops. Next to the barber shop is a kiosk, a shawarma restaurant, a halal meat shop, a Chinese street kitchen, a cobbler and a few pubs. The pubs are rather notorious for staging frequent public “incidents” on the street outside. Nearly everyone I met in Kontula has a first-hand story about something that has happened outside those pubs. Scuffles occasionally break out between young men, many of whom seem to be more than just drunk on alcohol. The shopping centre security guards arrive to break up the fights, but more often than not they are already busy with something else and the skirmish continues until someone backs down and walks away. There have been instances when someone has been stabbed, but generally altercations do not escalate beyond yelling and cursing back and forth. Nevertheless, the fairly regular restlessness on the street makes some residents feel nervous and uncomfortable walking near the area. The talk of the town is that some of the regular customers at these pubs are drug dealers and the police have done several raids in the past and frisked their customers. This has had little effect on the scene. Consequently, most residents tend to avoid the sidewalk adjacent to Altin’s shop.

“Sometimes drug users come inside the shop. Like this one guy came in recently and asked to use the toilet. He was obviously on some drugs and having a panic attack. He was completely desperate to get into the toilet, so I let him in.” Altin sprayed water on my head and started combing my hair. “How short do you want this?”

On the table in front of me were some car magazines, a hair dryer, clippers and a jar of gel. On the walls were framed photographs of famous Hollywood actors, athletes and male hair models. We usually talked about Kontula with Altin. He was originally from Turkey and he moved to Kontula with his family about six or seven years ago. I told him about my research, and he told me stories about things he had seen and experienced at the shopping centre. He spoke softly.

“But you know, most of what happens around here happens between the drug users and doesn’t usually involve me or any of my customers,” he said reassuringly.

I often heard residents say that. That these things happened within certain social circles. *Mind your own business and don’t get involved.* Be streetwise, in other words.

Yet, Altin did occasionally get involved. As a resident and as a popular barber, he talked to countless people on a daily basis, he knew regulars by name, and he kept his eye on the plaza. If he saw someone doing something completely out of line, he did not hesitate to intervene. Discreetly, of course.

"I once saw someone selling drugs to a person that was so impatient that he was jumping up and down, and as soon as he got his hands on the stuff, he started shooting up right there, out in the open. I called the police, but they had already left by the time the police arrived."

In some ways, Altin was the archetype of what Jane Jacobs calls 'the eyes upon the street' (1992 [1961]: 35). According to Jacobs, shopkeepers and other small businesses have a vested interest in maintaining peace and order in their locale, and as such they are often great street watchers and side-walk guardians. However, despite the occasional incident outside his shop, Altin did not seem to harbour animosity towards the local drug users.

"Sometimes drug users are customers too. Like this one customer came in and when I was cutting his hair, he told me he was having a bad day, so I asked him why. He said, because he is addicted to drugs. He was only around 30 years old. He said he has been addicted to drugs since he was a 15-year-old and that he wants to end his own life."

Altin paused. His voice grew more serious.

"I tried to console him, telling him to keep trying and to not quit. He then told me he had a 11-year-old daughter. *It raised the hairs on my arms*. I told him he should think of his daughter and not give up, that he is still so young. It really shook me. He was so young, and he had a daughter."

I was admittedly somewhat surprised by this account. Drug users are some of the most stigmatised persons in the neighbourhood, and, as such, often experience social avoidance in their daily social interactions (Hoolachan 2020), especially if they visibly bear other negatively perceived characteristics related, for instance, to poverty (Goffman 1963). At the local level, much of the stigma experienced by residents living in the neighbourhood is redirected to particular groups and individuals. Wacquant calls it 'lateral denigration and mutual distanciation'; a process in which territorial stigma is thrust onto a faceless and demonised other; in this case, the local drug users (2007: 68). Yet, Altin not only welcomed the man as a customer, but was willing to engage with him at an emotional level. The interaction seemed to cross the symbolic social

boundaries (Lamont & Molnár 2002) associated with stigmatised persons. This illustrates how perceived rules of engagement – avoidance and exclusion – are often negated when we observe actual interactions between people in their daily lives. At the most fundamental level, crossing social boundaries is about the participant's 'willingness to engage with the Other' (Hannerz 1996: 103). It raises the question, whether regular social interaction at the neighbourhood level with stigmatised persons augments tolerance of social difference.

While Altin began our conversation by recounting typical stories of living in an area with an open drug scene, stories I've heard countless times before, and which are part and parcel of the narrative of the bad neighbourhood, he countered that narrative by revealing a more tolerant perspective born out of regular social interaction and a degree of familiarity with the stigmatised Other. In fact, Altin was well aware of the shopping centre's reputation as "the drug mall" (*huumeostari*) and the way in which he was positioned as a local resident with the power to propagate this one-sided narrative by recounting unsettling stories about drug users to his customers.

"It's really not so bad here," he continued. "Especially the violence is nearly not as bad as in many other countries. And any place like this shopping centre that attracts so many people, there will be drugs and alcohol. Most of Kontula is very calm, nice and quiet. I wouldn't want to work or live anywhere else."

With this remark Altin contested and resisted the territorial stigma associated with the neighbourhood (Lamont & Mizrachi 2012; Kusenbach 2020) by comparing it to other places abroad he considers much worse off. Perhaps Altin recognised that we were perpetuating stereotypes in our conversation. He attached positive attributes to the neighbourhood that brought to question the narrative of a bad neighbourhood, and even challenged the idea that drugs and alcohol are somehow unique social problems to Kontula. In order to give weight to this opinion, he asserted that he is quite happy to live in the neighbourhood and does not wish to move away. When I asked him, "Why is that?", he replied, "Because I know everyone here," suggesting that he has established an attachment to the neighbourhood through social familiarity. In other words, Altin felt a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood through his daily social practices. And in Altin's case, these social practices include regular encounters with stigmatised persons. Junnilainen has observed in similar circumstances that 'contrary to general assumptions, residents living in stigmatised territories often experience belonging and attachment to their neighbourhood' (2020: 46). During the course of my fieldwork, it became apparent

that residents like Altin who regularly spent time interacting with others at the shopping centre, and who through these shared social practices have developed a sense of belonging, were more likely to resist perpetuating narratives of the bad neighbourhood and were more tolerant of social difference in their daily lives.

Altin lifted a hand-held mirror so that I could view the back of my head.

"If you want it shorter, just let me know," he said.

"Thanks, no that's good."

Altin opened my apron and brushed off the excess hair from my neck. With one graceful tug, he lifted the apron from my lap and said, "You welcome."

"Hey, listen, is it okay with you if I write about the things we've talked about?" I asked Altin.

"Yes, of course, but *don't exaggerate how bad it is here.* Don't only write bad things about Kontula," Altin replied.

Altin's concern for Kontula's reputation was illustrative of how residents in stigmatised neighbourhoods are often aware of the way the neighbourhood is regularly subjected to symbolic exaggeration (Jensen, Prieur & Skjott-Larsen 2021), and how incidents of deviance are routinely sensationalised and referred back to as sociocultural traits of the residents living in the neighbourhood (Wacquant, Slater & Pereira 2014: 1274). Local narratives of the neighbourhood are therefore always in dialogue with how outsiders perceive and circulate stories about the neighbourhood, typically through the media (Tuominen 2019 & 2020). Residents participate in this process by either perpetuating, downplaying or resisting these referential meanings, leading to different outcomes regarding their sense of belonging in the neighbourhood (Kusenbach 2020). Residents may, for instance, align with stigmatising narratives and distance themselves from the daily life of the neighbourhood, or they may feel a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood and choose to downplay how bad it *really* is. Tuominen furthermore argues that residents may also situationally shift between these different registers depending on who they are speaking to and in what context (2020). Residents are therefore able to adjust their behaviour and rhetoric according to what they consider the most appropriate response in a given situation (ibid: 41).

In the above interaction, Altin recognised that my writing may contribute to the circulation of negative portrayals of the neighbourhood and therefore hoped that I would not perpetuate a one-sided perspective of the neighbourhood. He adjusted his narrative

of Kontula accordingly and revealed a personal sense of belonging and sociability that he experiences in the neighbourhood despite daily proximity with stigmatised persons and landscapes.

4.2 The spatial clustering of fear and stigma

As mentioned in the previous section, there is a tendency for some residents in Kontula to re-direct territorial stigma experienced at the neighbourhood level to a more specific site: the open-air shopping centre. As one resident put it, "The issue is really only with the shopping centre. You don't have to go more than two-hundred metres away from the shopping centre and discover that this neighbourhood is just like any other." While most residents I encountered similarly emphasised how Kontula is just like any other neighbourhood with "regular people" and families living there, the shopping centre is often perceived as a place where dubious characters hang out and give the whole neighbourhood a bad reputation. Consequently, social and ethnic boundaries are primarily negotiated in the public spaces of the shopping centre. It is in these urban spaces that residents observe diversity and deviance and find different ways of coping and living with difference. Re-directing territorial stigma is a way for some residents to distance themselves from the 'blemish of place' (Wacquant 2007: 67), allowing them to align with a normative sensibility (Tuominen 2019) and to engage in a narrative of place from an outside perspective without having to taint themselves through association. The shopping centre is thus the site of multiple overlapping processes of stigmatisation and boundary making, including but not limited to issues related to poverty, drug use and alcoholism, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In this section, I primarily focus on stigma and marginalisation related to issues of ethnicity, alcohol and drug use, and how the parallel processes of stigmatisation and ethnic boundary making create specific sites and spaces of social marginalisation within the shopping centre area.

According to the most recent survey studies conducted by the city of Helsinki, resident experiences of security and safety in the city has improved in recent years (Keskinen 2019), and the differences between the neighbourhoods within the city have lessened (Keskinen & Pyyhtiä 2019). While in my qualitative interviews the recent development of neighbourhood level safety was a contentious issue, there was some agreement on

where in Kontula experience of unsafety was a common occurrence. Most residents who raised concern over unsafety in the neighbourhood, cited the shopping centre, the metro station entrance and particular pubs as specific sites of unsafety. This finding is supported by recent map-based surveys conducted in the area (Väliniemi-Laurson & Rönnberg 2019). The number of local pubs at the shopping centre and public drug use were issues that garnered most attention. Some residents emphasised the ethnic aspect of recent developments in local alcohol and drug use, observing how the crowd has become more diverse. One local social worker commented on this by saying, "It seems like the local immigrant youth have become a little too integrated into the Finnish alcohol culture."

The local pubs have long been a source of debate and moral scrutiny in Kontula as well as in other suburban housing estates in Finland. Pertti Alasuutari et al. (1997 [1985]) have described in detail how the working-class pubs of the Finnish suburbs in the 1980s became a substitute for the social environments young migrant workers left behind in the countryside. The pubs also provided the suburban communities with an antithesis for the "good life" and the moral condemnation and disapproval of 'those who are always in there' maintained the moral community (ibid: 39-44). As the 1990s economic depression hit particularly hard in working-class neighbourhoods such as Kontula (see chapter 2.1), many failing businesses were replaced by pubs. The re-structuring of the liberal economy meant that some workers became permanently unemployed, many of whom began to spend their days at the pub, highlighting the social boundaries of an increasingly stratified working-class. Junnilainen has argued that suburban pubs to this day represent 'the spatial clustering' of local social contradictions, because they are simultaneously 'the local living rooms as well as symbols of bad life' (2019: 212, my translation). While pubs still attract their share of criticism, more recently the shopping centre has been labelled a "drug mall" in the media (Hämäläinen 2019) due to an entrenched local drug economy.

"I'd say, in the past 10 years the shopping centre has gone real bad," Timo said, as he sat down on the couch. Both Timo and his wife Ulla were born in the early 1970s, the first generation of residents that grew up in the newly built housing estate. We were having coffee in their living room and talking about Kontula. "At the moment it's the only thing we really talk about if we say something about Kontula – the unrest at the shopping centre, the immigrants and the fighting junkies," Timo continued.

Some residents maintained that the drug dealing has become more obvious and transparent in recent years. There are several commonly known areas in the immediate vicinity of the shopping centre where drugs are consumed, and needles are often discarded into the environment[1]. Some residents, like Timo and Ulla say that the situation has become intolerable, and that they are especially concerned for the local children and young people. "You know if you think about the kids – because sure, adults are maybe able to handle the reality of these things – but imagine a 7 to 10-year-old kid walking along and there's a group of junkies mainlining out in the open. I mean c'mon, that's pretty wild," he said.

Timo personally avoids the shopping centre and primarily visits the grocery store with the car so he can park underground and do his shopping without having to walk through the public spaces. His wife Ulla, on the other hand, visits the shopping centre nearly every day for groceries and swimming. She says she normally doesn't feel bothered or threatened by anyone, but she does avoid particular areas in the shopping centre where drug users tend to congregate. These are examples of what Virgílio Pereira and João Queirós refer to as 'strategies of *focused avoidance*'; the way that some residents in stigmatised neighbourhoods distance themselves and avoid certain local public contexts and social relations in their daily practices (2014: 1310, original emphasis). Residents thus develop mental topographies of local urban spaces in which they curtail their involvement.

Timo also said that one of the defining changes that affected his experience of the public spaces of the shopping centre was when smoking became prohibited inside pubs and restaurants in 2007.

"One of the big issues is the smoking policy change. Now all the drunkards are out on the street causing trouble. It really degraded the shopping centre, when the day drinkers and the alcoholics, they stand outside the pub smoking and growling at people. Before they used to be inside the pub, out of sight."

There are several pubs in the interior sections of the shopping centre that are located along busy alleyways. Customers from the pubs regularly step outside for a

[1] The low-threshold service centre Symppis, located at the shopping centre, organises regular cleaning patrols consisting largely of local residents, who collect discarded needles from the environment. Consequently, the situation has improved in recent years. Furthermore, the city has installed numerous sharps containers into which users can discard needles themselves. Local outreach workers have said that many of the drug users in Kontula are also aware of the problem themselves and instruct others not to discard needles into the environment.

smoke and occasionally there is some interaction between heavily intoxicated customers and other residents. If residents complained about there being too many pubs at the shopping centre, the more practical explanation given for their disapproval is nearly always related to the visible activities outside pub, not what goes on inside.

Out of all the pubs that residents talk about, no other pub exemplifies the spatial clustering of fear and stigma as prominently as a pub which I will call here The Amsterdam[2]. The Amsterdam is located at the central plaza and activities outside the pub are visible to anyone walking along the main thoroughfare of the shopping centre. In recent years the pub has become locally famous for two particular reasons. For one, the pub is very popular especially among young Afro-Finns, something that has been uncommon in the past; and two, there is an alleged drug dealing scene that takes place around the immediate vicinity of The Amsterdam. These two factors are prominent in the way residents speak about the pub, and in local gossip the pub indeed sticks out like a sore thumb. Many of the residents I interviewed noted how young polydrug users[3] tend to hang out at The Amsterdam. While alcoholism is often frowned upon by residents and symbolises the "bad life" as mentioned before, polydrug use is associated with very strong stereotypes of aggressive and unpredictable behaviour. Despite polydrug use being a complex social phenomenon referring to a range of different forms depending on the social and cultural context, the colloquial meaning of a polydrug user (*sekakäyttäjä*) is analogous with a taint of shame that brands them as a total outsider avoided even in health care services (Hakkarainen et al. 2019). This results in a deep-seated fear and even anger towards people who are hanging out at The Amsterdam, whether they are themselves polydrug users or not.

Stories about The Amsterdam circulate among residents, perhaps sometimes mixing some fiction with facts, cementing The Amsterdam as a place of vice and debauchery. I have heard a resident say that one can step inside The Amsterdam and buy anything from guns to heroin. Most residents I talked to have never visited the pub themselves but circulate stories they have heard from others. There is an air of intimidation that surrounds the place, and people who spend their time at this pub are viewed as highly suspect, if not outright criminal. Some residents insist that the pub

[2] I use pseudonyms for all pubs discussed in this thesis. Kontula's shopping centre is known to have several pubs named after European capital cities. I therefore decided to reflect this trend by assigning city names as pseudonyms.

[3] With polydrug use I refer to the simultaneous use of two or more psychoactive substances (not including nicotine); such as alcohol, cannabis, amphetamines and prescription drugs (Hakkarainen et al. 2019: 193).

"should be blown up", while others have described it as "a lair of evil" and "a drug cave". These hyperboles underline the stigma associated with the pub. The Amsterdam represents both a place of drugs and violence, but also serves for some residents as an example of the problems related to immigration.

"These days even the immigrants are drug addicts and alcoholics. It's become really unsafe," Ulla said when I asked her about what has changed in Kontula more recently.

"So, you think the unsafety has to do specifically with drug use?" I asked.

"Yes, I think it definitely has to do with that, and the immigrant problem, that they're becoming marginalised, and they have nothing to do, they just hang around at the shopping centre," Timo replied.

The "immigrant problem" in this context is loosely associated with the local drug scene, and as a further extension it is assumed to have a causal relationship with unsafety in the neighbourhood. The recent rise of problematic drug use in Finland[4] does correspond to a simultaneous increase of immigrants in the neighbourhood, yet the assumed correlation between the two is very unlikely. Problematic drug use has increased nationwide and not only in areas where there is a larger proportion of residents with foreign background. Problematic drug use is primarily an urban phenomenon in Finland, and is most prevalent among young people, and slightly more prevalent among unemployed and individuals with lower levels of education (Rönkä et al. 2020, Hakkarainen et al. 2019). Some residents I talked to see the local drug scene as a territorial struggle over urban space: "The immigrant junkies are even taking space away from Finnish junkies." Phenotypical features are a common way to classify different individuals into arbitrary groups (Wimmer 2008: 974), but in practice the groups of drug users I observed spending time at the shopping centre were often ethnically mixed.

However, there seems to exist a parallel between ethnic marginalisation and social marginalisation due to problematic drug use in the minds of some residents. In other words, not only are individuals at The Amsterdam stigmatised because of

[4] According to the National Institute of Health and Welfare the use of drugs and related problems has increased nationwide during the previous decade (THL 2020). Problematic drug use, which refers to drug use that has serious social and health consequences such as intravenous use of amphetamines and opioids, is especially prevalent among 25 to 34-year-old men (ibid: 38). This new generation of amphetamine and opioid users is bigger than ever before (Rönkä *et* al 2020) and approximately a third of all problematic use occurs in the Capital region (THL 2020: 39).

polydrug use, but they are also stigmatised as “immigrants” according to their perceived ethnic background. One resident put it in a nutshell when he said, “Probably the lowest rung of society has to be the junkie Somalis, you can’t sink further down than that”. Individuals may therefore become stigmatised based on several different characteristics that form an aggregate sum. This manifests as a spatial clustering of fear and stigma and the focused avoidance of particular spaces within the social landscapes of the shopping centre, as illustrated by The Amsterdam.

4.3 Transethnic localism and belonging in the margins

It was an early Thursday evening in late September when I walked into The Amsterdam. I had been to the pub several times in the past. I remember shortly after moving into Kontula in 2012 that I had seen through the windows two forty-something punks with large and colourful mohawks sitting inside. That made an impression on me because at the time I thought it was unusual even for Kontula and The Amsterdam seemed somewhat unconventional compared to the other pubs in the shopping centre. Not your regular karaoke dive bar for the local pensioners. I visited the pub every now and then out of curiosity. Even before anyone had told me stories about The Amsterdam, I had found it slightly intimidating walking into the pub. There were often groups of young men smoking outside the pub and they always seemed to keep a close eye on anyone walking by. I often saw scuffles break out within these groups of men, especially at night. I didn’t personally know anyone at the pub, but every time I visited The Amsterdam, I found it a very sociable place and talking to strangers came naturally there. Over the years I also noticed it became a very popular place for young Afro-Finns, and often in the evenings the place was packed with a diverse crowd of locals. They occasionally played loud dancehall and Afrobeat music and people danced inside. Despite the negative reputation circulated about The Amsterdam, the pub hosted a lively scene of avid partygoers on the weekends and based on the conversations I had there it seemed to be a meeting place for people from very diverse cultural backgrounds.

It was only around 4 p.m. but there was already seven or eight people inside. I didn’t have a plan, other than getting a drink and to see what happens. I walked across the floor to the bar at the back of the small room and ordered a pint of beer. There were stools at the bar, and I noticed Jarno sitting at the other end. He was sipping on a shot of Finnish liqueur. He didn’t recognise me. We had met once before at The Amsterdam

before I had decided to do research in Kontula, and Jarno had made an impression on me when he had said, quite adamantly, "*Assholes are assholes, and good guys are good guys, it doesn't matter what colour of skin you have.*" Jarno was an ethnic Finn, in his mid-forties, born and raised in Kontula.

I decided not to bother Jarno as he was talking to someone else. I took the beer to the large high table middle of the pub. I happened to catch the eye of a much older ethnic Finnish woman. She was a formidable looking large lady, and heavily inebriated based on the movement of her eyes. She walked over to me.

"You visit here much?" she asked.

"Sometimes," I replied.

"I don't. But it's nice. You like it here?"

"Yeah, it's pretty alright," I replied.

I felt like the lady was perhaps looking for special company at the pub, so despite her friendliness I decided to exit the conversation and went over to Jarno to say hi.

"Nice ass!" she yelled as I walked away.

"Looks like she likes you," Jarno said and smirked after I greeted him.

I told Jarno that I was doing research on Kontula. I said that I'm particularly interested in how people from diverse backgrounds get along in Kontula.

"Isn't that a bit of a dull topic?" he said. "If you walk into one of those barber shops and start asking the Iraqi barbers for interviews, they'll just laugh at you."

Nevertheless, he enjoyed talking and I kept listening. Jarno explained how there should be more events where different ethnic groups could hang out and meet each other: "Maybe a football tournament, where people could put up stalls and sell food from different countries."

There was a group of young men hanging out near the door. I assumed some of them were Somali and they spoke in Finnish while some of the other men spoke only in English and were of Black African descent. They went out for cigarettes every now and then. The atmosphere inside the pub was relaxed and friendly.

Jarno asked one of his friends near the door to join us. Kobe was originally from Ghana and he spoke in English. When Jarno told Kobe that I wanted to interview people, I thought I heard Kobe ask Jarno, "Is this for surveillance?"

"No, no, for research," Jarno replied.

After that Kobe spoke freely and I didn't feel any apprehension on his part. I gathered that since Jarno trusted me, Kobe did too. Jarno, on the other hand, began to

doubt his initial unguardedness towards me, despite my questions to Kobe being very innocent. For instance, he said at one point in mid-sentence, "You live in Kontula, at least according to your own words," suggesting that I might be lying about being a local. Before I left the pub that day, I had also asked Jarno to remind me what Kobe's name was. He refused to tell me even though Kobe had already done so. Perhaps Jarno became hesitant after Kobe told us that undercover police had recently visited the pub and some people were afraid. Jarno's secretive and cautious behaviour towards me was therefore in solidarity with Kobe and the others and I was an outsider who could potentially have malicious motives against them.

"Here in Kontula we can be ourselves," Kobe said. "It's one big family! Like the other day we talked to these two Russian guys. At first they were very reserved but after a while they relaxed and now we're all friends."

Kobe told me he lives in Mellunmäki[5] and visits Kontula's shopping centre nearly every day. He was drinking tea. He had a friendly and relaxed way of speaking, although he also had a habit of bringing his face very close to mine when he spoke.

"I think some Finnish people are afraid of us Africans because they don't know us, they never speak to us, so they don't know we are the same as them. We all bleed red blood. The colour of the skin doesn't mean anything. They are only like that because they don't know us," Kobe said.

From Kobe's perspective xenophobic fear and racist prejudice is due to a lack of social interaction and familiarity, an unwillingness to engage and recognise sameness. This fear then leads to avoidance and social exclusion. Kobe gave an example being excluded when he told us a story about how a doorman in the city centre didn't allow him to enter a club with his Finnish girlfriend. After a short negotiation it became obvious that the only reason he was barred was because of the colour of his skin. Several other individuals I interviewed described similar racist experiences in the city centre. Kobe felt like there isn't the same kind of prejudice towards minorities in Kontula.

"That's why all these people come to Kontula, because you are allowed to be different. The most important thing is that you are yourself."

Kobe suggested that perhaps one reason why so many drug users come to Kontula is because at the shopping centre they are allowed to hang out with minimal

[5] Mellunmäki is a neighbourhood located east of Kontula. It is the second largest neighbourhood in the Mellunkylä district, with 8700 residents. Mellunmäki is one metro stop away from Kontula.

harassment from security, compared to other districts in Helsinki where drug users are quickly ushered away for loitering. However, more recently he had observed a more hardened attitude towards places like The Amsterdam.

"People call the police and they come around more often now. I understand people don't like bringing their children around when other people are hanging outside the bars and maybe drinking in public. I don't do that myself. If I have a beer, I'll take the beers with me somewhere out of sight."

He pointed away from the shopping centre, towards a nearby park, called Kostinkallio, perched on a little hill that overlooks the shopping centre. For decades there used to be an unofficial drinking place in the park, known locally as "Mäyräbaari" ("the badger bar"), which was a well-known hangout spot for alcoholics and drug users. The city had recently invested a lot of money in renovating the park in order to make it more 'family friendly'. Some locals have observed how the park's newly paved paths are now wide enough for police vans to drive through.

I asked Kobe about the park.

"It's the most stupid thing ever! They built the park, and now we are not allowed to use it. They used one million euros on that park and for what? Everybody knows why."

Although Kobe quickly moved on to another topic before I could ask him anything more about it, I got the sense that he felt like the city doesn't want people like him hanging around the park. That the money was specifically used to clean out undesirable people from the park.

This conversation inside The Amsterdam with Jarno and Kobe exemplifies a contrasting perspective on the shopping centre when compared to the narratives in the previous section. Whereas previously I described how some residents fear and abhor the pub as a place of vice and depravity, customers I met inside the pub, such as Kobe, seem to view the shopping centre as a comparatively tolerant and inclusive environment, and the pub itself as a place where you can be yourself. The blemish of stigma associated with the Amsterdam, due to the drug scene and the racialisation of its customers, renders the pub a marginal space within the shopping centre. However, for marginalised individuals the pub has provided space to carve out a place of belonging where they do not feel out of place. This belonging emerges in everyday social interactions in which diversity and difference are accepted as desirable characteristics rather than boundaries to be avoided.

In fact, Jarno explained to me that the reason why he occasionally visits The Amsterdam is specifically because it is refreshing to hang out with individuals who do not all think and act the same. As a white ethnic Finn, he is free to choose to go into any pub in the shopping centre without fear of racial discrimination, yet he specifically chooses to go to The Amsterdam, a space in the margins. This seemed to be welcomed by others in the pub, as interaction I observed between customers was not divided according to any ethnic characteristics of participants.

The Amsterdam exemplifies a space in which ethnic boundaries are blurred and a form of "transethnic localism" is practiced (Wimmer 2008: 989). People of diverse ethnic backgrounds feel a sense of camaraderie and belonging in the pub. While ethnic identities do not disappear as an aspect of social interaction in the pub, the need to maintain their boundaries diminishes. While Jarno was explicit about how he downplays the relevance of ethnic categories in determining who he values as a person, it was his implicit distrust of me as an outsider that revealed the way he chose to align himself with Kobe and the others in the pub rather than with a fellow Finn. This interaction between the three of us in effect reconfigured normative categories of "us" and "them" and was made intelligible within the context of local processes of stigmatisation and social marginalisation. Instead of "us" the Finns, Jarno aligned with "us" the locals, the regulars of the pub. I was relegated to "them", an outsider at best but potentially an undercover police officer that could bring harm to the regulars.

Andreas Wimmer has argued that ethnic boundaries do not necessarily imply sharply bounded groups, and distinctions can be at times fuzzy and boundaries blurred, consequently 'allowing individuals to maintain membership in several categories or switch identities situationally' (2008: 976). Yet, a sense of transethnic solidarity within the marginal space of the pub suggests something more than mere fuzzy boundaries between groups. The conscious blurring of ethnic boundaries suggests a cosmopolitan culture. This inference is further supported in the way Kobe emphasises the cross-ethnic conviviality he has experienced at the pub and the way he views the diverse crowd as "one big family".

Similarly, Michèle Lamont and her colleagues have observed how blue-collar North African immigrants residing in the Paris suburbs emphasise universal membership to a human family and make claims of equality between all human beings (Lamont, Morning & Mooney 2002). Perhaps it is in contexts of urban marginality, in spaces where minorities and immigrants converge, that are most fertile to cosmopolitan

forms of allegiance and belonging. Paul Gilroy notes how ‘a degree of estrangement’ from a person’s own culture and history might even ‘qualify as essential to a cosmopolitan commitment’ (2004: 75). Newcomers and outsiders, migrants and refugees, individuals attempting to find new forms of belonging that are not constrained with arbitrary distinctions of ethnicity and nativeness. Such interactions move beyond issues of tolerance into an active and reciprocal engagement with difference and diversity (ibid).

Drawing upon Engin Isin’s (2002) work, Gareth Millington has described the cosmopolis as an urban political space where altern social groups, in their everyday struggles against stigma and social exclusion, come together to claim citizenship rights through their mere presence in the city (2011: 114). Such cosmopolitan spaces directly challenge the processes and discourses that constitute them ‘as objects of nuisance or dirt to be ‘cleansed’ from the *polis*’ (ibid). Thus, the everyday practices of belonging that transpire within spaces such as The Amsterdam challenge the authoritative meanings and functions associated with the shopping centre and expand local meanings of who belongs (Garbutt 2009: 85). It would also seem that those individuals that most experience alienation and social marginalisation in public spaces in the city – due to their lifestyle, their ethnicity, or their addiction – find inclusion and belonging in marginal urban spaces avoided by the mainstream. These spaces then become an environment where new forms of belonging and interaction develop.

In order to better understand why spaces such as The Amsterdam are significant for cosmopolitan formations, it is worth exploring the recent history of the neighbourhood and the context in which multicultural encounters have developed in the shopping centre. In the next section, I provide a perspectival history of the neighbourhood based on the narratives of residents I interviewed. While I only raise the voice of one person in the text, the narrative was supported by stories I was told by other research informants who lived in Kontula at the time.

4.4 A narrative of the past: xenophobia, skinheads and “white space”

While Kontula’s shopping centre is known today for its many ethnic restaurants and cafés that cater to a culturally diverse resident population, the local multiculturalism is a relatively recent development. Some of the members of ethnic minorities I interviewed moved to Kontula in the early 1990s when there were still relatively few immigrants

living in the neighbourhood. Much has changed at the shopping centre since then, especially for minority members of the community. When I interviewed Ali, a thirty-year-old man who grew up in Kontula since he was a child it became apparent how different the change at the shopping centre has been for him compared to many of his native Finnish neighbours.

Ali was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, and in 1993 when he was four years old, he moved with his mother and siblings to Finland in order to escape the civil war. After a year living in a reception centre and learning the Finnish language the family settled in Kontula where Ali has lived ever since. Ali said that as a child he had no problems making friends with other children in the neighbourhood and that he has many fond memories of the local school, library and youth centre. Yet, the shopping centre sticks out in his early memories as an unwelcoming and even hostile place.

"My mother told me that when we moved to Kontula there weren't almost any black people here, and when we visited the shopping centre people would stare at us strangely and some people would even yell and spit at us."

Ali's family moved into the neighbourhood shortly after the 1990s economic depression in Finland when unemployment hit particularly hard in working-class neighbourhoods such as Kontula (Kokkonen 2002: 165-167). At the time there were not many immigrants in the neighbourhood, apart from a small number of Russians, Estonians, Ingrian Finnish returnees and Vietnamese (Luukka & Muukkonen 1997: 36). There was also a tightly knit community of Finnish Swedes that had lived in the neighbourhood since the 1960s (Kokkonen 2002: 85). During the time Ali's family settled in Kontula the number of immigrants doubled in the neighbourhood between the years 1993-1995 (Luukka & Muukkonen 1997: 36). Most of them came from Somalia. Apart from the challenges of adjusting into a new culture and way of life, immigrants also had to face xenophobia and the fear becoming a target of racist hate crime in public spaces.

"It was a crazy time back then. You couldn't go out after dark; people were really scared. They said you'd get beaten up at Kontula's shopping centre because there were so many skinheads hanging around. Then I think about how full of diversity the shopping centre is today. It has changed. I think it's great, I think it's really great."

In the mid 1990s Panu Luukka and Marita Muukkonen (1997) researched and interviewed members of a racist skinhead youth gang in Kontula. The formation of the gang in the early 1990s was initially motivated by a shared loathing of the unemployed

alcoholics and drug users, and what the skinheads saw as the degradation of the local working-class community during the economic depression. They occasionally expressed this loathing with arbitrary acts of violence against local alcoholics (ibid: 38). The skinheads also shared a deep-seated hatred towards Russians in the neighbourhood. When Somali refugees began moving into Kontula in the mid 1990s the skinheads became more politically motivated. Inspired by radical far-right ideology the skinheads viewed the new residents as a threat and an enemy to ethnic Finns collectively. They started targeting and attacking immigrants on the street with the sole purpose of driving them away from the neighbourhood by spreading an atmosphere of fear and hate (ibid: 36). Racially motivated violence and the skinhead subculture subsequently gained notoriety in Finland during this time. In 1998 the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) produced the now famous *Skinivalkoinen Suomi* television documentary (Mokko 1998) about Helsinki Skins, a racist skinhead club in Sörnäinen near central Helsinki. The documentary recounts a violent incident from 1997 when the Helsinki Skins gathered a large number of skinheads and attacked a group of largely Black African immigrants playing football in Kontula. According to police reports nearly one-hundred people were involved in the fight. The incident was instigated by local skinheads in Kontula who during the previous weekend had had an altercation with some Somali footballers at the local pitch.

While events like these were rare and the violence perpetrated by the skinheads was largely sporadic and random, their hostile attitude towards refugees was not isolated within the wider community. It was embedded in a fear and distrust towards ethnic Others that reflected the social disgruntlement of the times. Kids of immigrant families such as Ali's were often bullied in school and even complete strangers would occasionally lash out with racist insults on the street. The manager of a local kindergarten in the 1990s said that at the time it was unreasonable to expect native Finns to be tolerant of newcomers, because they had not been prepared in any way to understand the culture or conditions from which the immigrants were coming from (Kokkonen 2002: 167-168). In a neighbourhood that was experiencing a high level of unemployment and economic hardship, old residents 'could not understand how immigrants can buy a lot of goods' (ibid, my translation). Accordingly, ethnic minorities regularly faced prejudice and their behaviour was often scrutinised by native Finns. Ali referred to this sense of scrutiny when he said, "Back in the 90s if you even made the slightest mistake everyone was talking about it in the neighbourhood."

The atmosphere at the shopping centre was therefore markedly different in the 90s to what it is today. It was a space where individuals like Ali were marginalised and scrutinised due to the colour of their skin and made to feel unwelcomed and outnumbered in the neighbourhood. Elijah Anderson has described similar urban settings in the USA as "the white space" (Anderson 2015). As an urban ethnographer, Anderson has studied public spaces in different social contexts and analysed the way in which race informs power relations in public spaces, restaurants, schools and workplaces. While the history of racial and ethnic relations in North American society is very different from Finland, the idea of white space can also be used to describe a historical condition in Kontula in which an urban space, the shopping centre, is considered to be informally "off limits" for minorities (ibid: 10). According to Anderson, in such contexts in which the anonymous black person enters a space where there is an overwhelming presence of white people and where cross-ethnic social contacts have not become routine, stereotypes and even blatant discrimination can rule perceptions (ibid: 13).

To qualify the shopping centre as a white space does not require us to consider all local Finns of the 1990s to be racists and xenophobes, rather, the concept refers to the way particular urban spaces and social contexts can make a minority member feel as though they do not belong there. This experience of being excluded from public space at the shopping centre was shared by a number of my informants. Even a local Finnish Swede I talked to said that in the past, speaking in Swedish at the shopping centre was dangerous. When we compare this narrative of Kontula's past and the sense of marginalisation experienced by ethnic minorities in public spaces, to the social landscape in which residents live in today, we begin to see the immense changes that have happened in the neighbourhood since the 1990s.

"I think that back then it was just normal, you know, that this kind of [racist] stuff happened. These days there is sort of a zero-tolerance towards these things, and I think it's a good thing. Back then we didn't know how to handle it. I remember this one time when my brother came home with a black eye […] they had attacked him as a group. And now this new generation that live in Kontula, I think they've been pampered a bit, because they don't know that it used to be so crazy here. People don't even know what real prejudice and racism feels like anymore, when it's not only someone just looking at you funny or saying something weird, but that you *experience* it."

While it is important not to downplay everyday forms of racism that are still experienced by ethnic minorities in Helsinki's public spaces (E.g., Ojanen 2018 & Isotalo 2016), we must recognise the historical context from which Ali narrates his experience of the shopping centre. Ali has witnessed a palpable change in atmosphere and attitude towards minorities in Kontula. Open hostility and scrutiny have become less pronounced and given way to more prosaic social encounters in which ethnic differences are not as underlined as they were before. As Ali himself put it, "The atmosphere has changed in Kontula and it's no longer a 'wow' thing that different looking people live there." One of the crucial ways in which this changed atmosphere has affected Ali's experience of the shopping centre is that the sense of fear is gone.

"I feel it's safe. I don't know if it's just because of the reputation, but quite many people say that Kontula is unsafe, especially at night. I don't know if it's maybe The Amsterdam that causes fear these days. But you know I used to be afraid to visit the shopping centre sometimes too when I was 14 or 15 years old. Back then The Amsterdam didn't exist. [Other pubs] were scary back then, because the drunks could be quite aggressive sometimes."

While Ali is aware of the reputation places like The Amsterdam have, his own experiences of unsafety in the neighbourhood are more tied to his experiences of racism and marginalisation in the past. From his perspective The Amsterdam does not seem to be so different from the other pubs of the past, if weighed according to personal experiences of unsafety. The growing diversity and more tolerant atmosphere have transformed the shopping centre from a "white space" into a space where Ali does not feel like a scrutinised outsider. This has been integral to his experience of safety in the neighbourhood. In this way a sense of belonging is also tied to experiences of safety, especially among minority members of the neighbourhood. Of course, in terms of subjective experiences of safety there are other factors involved; for instance, men are twice as likely to consider their neighbourhood safe compared to women in Helsinki (Keskinen 2019). Also, a larger portion of women avoid particular urban spaces near their home (16%) compared to men (8%) (Näsi & Danielsson 2020: 63). Yet, Ali's improved experience of safety also seems to correlate with a trend in recent surveys in which the experience of safety among foreign language speakers[6] in their neighbourhoods has significantly improved in recent years (Keskinen 2019). The

[6] "Foreign language speakers" is a category often used in Finnish demographic statistics to differentiate those residents whose mother tongue is other than Finnish or Swedish.

routinised proximity and familiarity with diversity in Kontula has led to a less hostile and more tolerant neighbourhood.

Although certainly not all residents are happy with how ethnically diverse the neighbourhood has become, adding immigrants to the long list of local social problems, there were also those who saw cultural diversity as a much-welcomed characteristic of local social life. While for residents such as Ali the shopping centre has become safer and more inclusive of minorities since the 1990s, other residents noted how the growing immigrant population has also contributed to the vitality and diversity of services in the shopping centre. These changes have contributed to a more inclusive social landscape where a diversity of people have an equal claim to urban space in the city.

4.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have used ethnographic examples to illustrate the complex dichotomy between experiences of fear and belonging in Kontula's shopping centre. As a stigmatised territory in the urban margins of Helsinki, residents propagate and respond to the narrative of the bad neighbourhood in various ways. While some residents confirm negative stereotypes about the shopping centre and bring attention to local social problems and issues of unsafety, others downplay these problems and instead emphasise how tolerant and sociable the shopping centre is. There seems to be some correlation between the degree of social involvement at the shopping centre and the likelihood that the resident will resist negative stereotypes of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, processes of stigmatisation and social marginalisation seem to spatially cluster in particular locations, as exemplified by a pub named The Amsterdam. Such spaces reveal new forms of transethnic localism that stand in stark contrast to narratives of the neighbourhood's recent history. While it is easy to fall into the trap of romanticising a cosmopolitanism in the urban margins, it is important to acknowledge that spaces such as The Amsterdam, while feared and avoided by many residents, are also important spaces of belonging for persons who are most likely to experience social exclusion elsewhere in the city. Instead of vilifying and demonising groups and individuals that occupy these spaces, it is worth attempting to understand the social processes that bring such spaces into existence. While the growing immigrant population in Kontula is often associated with local social problems in narratives of the bad neighbourhood, there also exist parallel and alternative narratives in which the

neighbourhood has become safer and more inclusive especially for minorities that experienced fear and marginalisation in the past.

With this context in mind, in the next chapter I continue expanding on an analysis of the ways in which residents negotiate and cope with diversity and difference in various social contexts of the shopping centre. I continue to pay particular attention to the themes of fear and belonging when discussing the social processes through which social and ethnic boundaries are both constructed and blurred, and how the tension of difference is recognised and reconciled.

5. Negotiation of difference in everyday encounters

In the previous chapter, I assessed the dichotomy between experiences of fear and belonging in Kontula's shopping centre. I illustrated how particular urban spaces and social practices evoke at times contradictory meanings among residents, revealing both historical and current processes of social marginalisation within the context of a socially mixed and multi-ethnic neighbourhood. In this chapter, I examine the minutiae of everyday social interactions in order to explore what it means to negotiate difference in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood. The habitual engagement of people from different backgrounds takes place in particular semi-public spaces where shared consumption habits bring people together. These spaces contain micropublics of urban interculturalism (Amin 2002) in which difference is both contested and accommodated. In this chapter, I argue that the capacity to accommodate tension and transgressions rather than the achievement of community consensus is crucial to the formation of cosmopolitan publics. In other words, the everyday social contact and equal access and sharing of public space between people from different backgrounds is predicated by a tolerance of conflict.

5.1 Conviviality at the pub

At one of the far corners of the shopping centre is a small pub called Café Pub Brussels, owned by a Pakistani man named Said. The pub is fairly easy to miss as it does not attract much attention, unlike some other pubs nearby, such as The Amsterdam, described in the previous chapter. Under a small façade emblazoned with the pub's name is a door that opens onto a short set of stairs down into the bar. The narrow room

is slightly below street level and there is only one window that faces the street. Next to the stairs is a darts board and in front of the stairs are a few fruit machines. The pub hosts a small but active darts scene, and gambling machines are a popular pastime in areas like Kontula[7]. There are only seven tables and seating for around 38 customers on a busy night. The walls are painted orange and decorated with small flashing lights, and framed drawings of antique automobiles and old Coca-Cola advertisements. There is a green accordion on a tall table next to the bar. The bar itself is very typical to local standards: all the standard vodkas, whiskeys and gins, and cheap Finnish lager on the tap. At the bar there is a sign advertising happy hour for loyal customers: a pint of beer for €2 from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., and €2.90 from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. The average price for a pint of lager in Helsinki is €6 [8]. There are two TVs, each on opposite sides of the room. During the evenings, the TVs are used for karaoke.

The first time I visited Café Pub Brussels for research purposes it was a Friday night, and the house was nearly packed. I went there alone, as do many other residents who frequent Brussels. When I arrived, there were two middle-aged Thai women singing a classic Finnish tango tune at the centre of the room. An elderly and heavily inebriated Finnish man was dancing around the singers and cheering them on. There were Somali, Estonians, Finns, Senegalese and Thais, both young and old in the pub that night, and as far as I could tell, they were all locals from Kontula. What caught my eye was not only the obvious diversity of the crowd, but the way everyone seemed to be sharing the space with each other, in an atmosphere of conviviality. People were mingling. Groups that formed at each table were transient, as smokers would come in and out and sometimes lose their place to someone new. This was unlike the kind of behaviour one might find at a typical pub in the city centre of Helsinki, where groups of friends or colleagues rarely interact with anyone outside their circle. The unreservedness of people that frequented Café Pub Brussels made it possible for a resident to arrive alone and easily find company with whomever happened to be there that night. I observed that this courtesy was extended to strangers independent of the person's age, gender or ethnicity.

[7] According to a study conducted in 2018 (Selin et al. 2018) comparing the locations and spatial density of gambling machines (i.e., fruit machines) across Finland, gambling machines are concentrated in areas with the highest levels of unemployment, and lowest levels of income and education.
[8] Cost of living in Helsinki (2021) [Online]. Available from: https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Helsinki [Accessed 12 March 2021].

As the evening progressed, customers from other pubs walked in and people talked to whomever happened to sit next to them, engaging them in spontaneous conversation about topics that ranged from the crude to the profound. I noticed some of the customers from The Amsterdam overlapped those of Brussels. Some residents say that when The Amsterdam, "Gets a little too heated," some of the customers move on to Brussels for a more relaxed atmosphere. And unlike some of the other pubs at the shopping centre, Brussels was similar to The Amsterdam in the sense that conventional markers of difference were often less underlined than elsewhere. As my understanding of the local scene grew, I began to notice how it was the mundane habits and practices that pub goers shared with each other that formed the basis for this inclusivity and conviviality at the pub. For instance, a typical way to make conversation with others was to ask for a cigarette. One time a middle-aged Afro-Finnish man walked into the pub, opened a fresh packet of cigarettes and asked everyone in a loud voice, "Who do I owe cigarettes?" to which several people raised their hand.

Ash Amin argues that much of the negotiation of difference takes place at this kind of local level, within the everyday habitual engagement between people who come from different backgrounds (Amin 2002). Through the daily negotiation of difference and the formation of shared cultural practices – such as drinking alcohol and singing karaoke at the pub or sharing a moment smoking cigarettes outside – residents form what Amin calls 'micropublics' (ibid: 959). Within these micropublics of urban interculturalism, entrenched ethnic suspicions and xenophobia are contested making room for local forms of allegiance and participation. Despite their potential cultural differences residents recognise each other as locals, with a shared sense of belonging in Kontula. Furthermore, Suzanne Hall points out that these publics are not merely spaces of encounter but require sustained interaction and practices of participation to develop (2012: 6). If minorities or otherwise marginalised individuals do not form sustained positive experiences of inclusion in the local scene they will eventually stay away, which in turn leads to spatial segregation. She therefore argues that less official public spaces at the urban margins are crucial to the development of alternative publics because access and participation allows residents to learn the social and cultural skills required to cross boundaries between the familiar and unfamiliar.

In the next section I describe in more detail how residents negotiate difference and how a sense of conviviality accommodates moments of tension and transgression.

5.2 Negotiating difference in real time

Paul Gilroy has described conviviality as an 'unruly' mode of interaction in which differences are negotiated in real time (2006: 39). In situations where people live in close proximity with different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, moments of dissonance overlap with a sense of rapport. Gilroy, therefore, emphasises that conviviality should not signify the absence of racism, and that instead, conviviality should be understood as equipping people with the means of acknowledging the complexity of living with difference and managing their own interests with the interests of others (ibid: 40). Conviviality is always negotiated in relation to its negation: racism and ethnic antagonism. Furthermore, Les Back and Shamser Sinha note that it is also wrong to assume that conviviality is the simple consequence of living in proximity to difference (2018: 134-5). Everyday contact between people from diverse backgrounds offers an opportunity for conviviality, but it does not guarantee it (ibid). Therefore, conviviality suggests that residents learn to adapt to situations in which conflict is a potential outcome of an interaction, yet they consciously choose to mitigate conflict and ethnic antagonism.

I often went to Café Pub Brussels to write fieldnotes in the early afternoons. At this time of day, it was rarely busy, with perhaps one or two customers, and normally I had some time to myself before other customers started walking in. On one particular Thursday, I had just finished writing some notes about an uneventful morning and I was reading the newspaper. A dim winter's daylight washed over the pub and reflected off the tables and slot machines. The bartender hadn't yet turned the music on, and the atmosphere was very relaxed and pleasant. At the corner of the pub, not too far from where I was sitting, a woman and a man sat down to talk. They were around my age, maybe in their early thirties, the woman probably a little younger. They were speaking in Finnish but every now and then they would fill in some words or end a sentence in Somali language. I had the impression they were platonic friends. I didn't follow their conversation too closely until the woman got up to order another drink.

"Hey, how are you?" she asked the Pakistani bartender with a rather sweet inflection to her voice. She spoke in Finnish.

"Can I have two beers?"

She leaned on the bar with her elbows.

“Is everything alright? Do you enjoy working here?” she asked.

The bartender didn’t reply.

“Do Finns bother you at all? Do they give you shit because of the colour of your skin?”

The bartender still didn’t seem to reply with more than a slight tilt of his head, trying his best to ignore her questions while he poured her another pint of beer.

“No? Maybe they don’t bother you because you sell them beer? They don’t want to give you trouble because they get beer from you.”

I hesitated for a moment, *should I ask them*? I felt compelled to join in the conversation.

“What about you guys?” I asked the woman abruptly. “Are people racist towards you here in Kontula?”

The question was a lot more provocative than what it sounded in my head. The young woman and her friend both stared at me and remained silent. They were assessing me.

“Are Finns ever assholes towards you?” I asked again, as if calling Finns assholes would make me more approachable. I knew it was an extremely awkward thing to ask. Not only was I budding into their conversation, but I did so by asking them a direct question about a very sensitive topic. To them I was most likely an ethnic Finn, and I knew there was a hesitancy to speak about racism with white Finns until a certain level of trust and rapport was built. One of my research informants who is also a Somali Finn himself, explained to me that the reason for this apprehension is because there is an inherent vulnerability when opening up about this topic with a Finn: you can never know if the person you are talking to is suddenly going to turn out to be a racist themselves and use the things you have told them against you. So, all things considered, perhaps I was being insensitive. However, at the time I felt it was a calculated risk, as people at Brussels also tended to be forthright and plain-spoken even with strangers, and there was no one else apart from the bar tender to eavesdrop on us.

The woman put down the beers on the table and said, “Hang on, I’ll go to the toilet first.” As she left, her friend kept observing me. He was around my age. He wore dark plain clothes and had a short stubble beard.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to bother you,” I said. “I’m just genuinely interested to know if people here in Kontula are racist.”

"It depends who's asking," he replied and took a swig from his fresh pint of beer.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

*"*Yeah, I do."

He seemed to weigh my answer for a moment, then relaxed and smiled. Apparently it was good that I was a local.

"Yeah, there are many racists here in Kontula. More than elsewhere. It depends which bar you go to."

"Which bars have people like that?"

He named a few pubs from the shopping centre. Pubs that are popular especially among Finnish pensioners.

"And these security guards too," he said.

The young woman arrived back from the toilet in mid conversation. She seemed a little surprised, even amused, that we were talking.

"And you know, many of these old people here are really racist, they're like, '*This is just how things are!*' and they refuse to accept us," she said.

I had recently been privy to a conversation among some older white men in which they complained about how a group of similarly aged Somali men had the time to sit around at the café doing nothing when they should be at work.

"So, they don't necessarily say it to your face, but talk about you behind your back?" I asked.

"No, here in Kontula they precisely say it to your face!" she exclaimed.

At this point an elderly white woman walked into the bar.

"Welcome! Welcome here!" the young woman announced to the newcomer. The older woman barely acknowledged her as she walked up to the bar. After paying for her beer the older woman sat down to read a newspaper and I went to the toilet. When I got back, I overheard the young woman appease the older woman saying, "It won't happen again." I wondered what had happened.

"Don't speak so loudly! It hurts my ears," the older woman pleaded.

"It's our language. Somali language is like that, we speak loudly. But don't worry, it won't happen again. We can speak in Finnish, but then you'll understand everything we say."

"You can speak in your language but don't speak so loudly. Here in Finland, we don't speak like that, yelling at each other."

"In that case we'll speak in Finnish because you can't speak Somali quietly, like you're whispering," the young woman said in an appeasing tone, but with a hint of sarcasm.

The older woman's tone was not particularly hostile either, but it did expose a sense of entitlement to police the way the two friends were talking to each other. Although there is perhaps nothing odd about an older person asking younger people to keep their voices down in a semi-public space, it was an odd thing to complain about in a dive bar, whether it was a quiet afternoon or not. It also raises the question whether she would have reacted in the same way if the two friends would have been ethnic Finns. She also made a clear distinction by referring to "we" the Finns who do not speak in a loud manner, while the two friends were insinuated to be outsiders who need to be educated on how to behave in Finland. This is perhaps also what subjectively granted her the authority to intervene. Interestingly though, she stated that the problem was not the use of a non-Finnish language but the *way* in which it was spoken. In other words, the older woman was not necessarily motivated by a desire to *exclude* difference, but rather, she was *negotiating* her annoyance over cultural difference. Also, evident here is a degree of familiarity and unreservedness to engage strangers and voice disapproval.

The younger woman in turn chose to respond in a courteous manner, no doubt with deference due to age but perhaps also in an effort to avoid further conflict. It is interesting to note her ability to negotiate the situation by switching effortlessly between languages, and perhaps more importantly, her ability to switch modes of expression that the use of these languages involve. This indicates that she understands the cultural context in which the older woman's appeal was embedded. She said, "Somali language is like that," revealing that she is conscious of the way Somali language is spoken in contrast to the Finnish way of speaking, and how it may sound like to the older woman. Her ability to speak *and* understand the cultural nuances of these two languages allowed her to resolve the situation with tactfulness, despite the hostile undertones projected towards her ethnic background.

This was a typical example of how cultural difference in Kontula are negotiated at the local level. It illustrates the way ethnicity and cultural differences are acknowledged in mundane everyday interactions and how residents engage this difference in semi-public spaces. The crucial point to draw from this example is that despite the apparent tension and conflict that especially ethnic minorities encounter in

public spaces, residents show an ability to reconcile difference and negotiate compromise. This flexibility is a crucial aspect of local conviviality.

When discussing social encounters at the shopping centre with my research informants, language and the use of language seemed to be the most significant marker of difference. Apart from the pubs, I was told that the sauna at the local swimming pool was another space in which residents confronted difference on a regular basis. Again, simple issues such as the volume of conversation was a cause for annoyance in mundane encounters, and residents are forced to learn how to negotiate these situations or otherwise avoid the social spaces of the shopping centre. In far fewer cases were, for example, religious differences an issue of contention. One Finnish man told me he stopped visiting the local community centre because of a disagreement he had with the Muslims there about which rooms were appropriate to use for prayer. However, these types of conflicts seemed to be much rarer and the vast majority of negotiation I observed and was told about happened in very mundane encounters. Perhaps the lack of conflict on more controversial issues, such as religion or politics, says something about the degree of civility and respect that individuals and groups at the shopping centre extend to each other.

5.3 "You can never become a Finn!"

Later the two friends came over to sit with me and we introduced ourselves. Their names were Halima and Ahmed. Some of their other friends arrived shortly and Halima asked for us to look over her bag while she went out for a cigarette. "Can you keep an eye on my bag?" she said. "It has my work clothing." Ahmed got another beer and we continued to talk. He sat next to me so that we could talk more privately, as more people were arriving at the pub.

"You know, you're right, they often speak about us behind our backs," Ahmed said. "Name-calling and simply being prejudiced towards us. I've lived here for four years now, but I lived here before when I was younger. All together 12 years in Kontula. You know, in the nineties it was completely different here, it was crazy."

Ahmed confirmed what Ali had told me (see chapter 4.4) about what it was like to be a Somali child growing up in Kontula in the 1990s.

"So maybe in that sense things have changed for the better?" I asked him.

“Yeah, I think you’re right, it’s not as bad as it used to be. Things have changed for the better.”

“Are you a Finn yourself?” Ahmed asked me.

I told Ahmed about myself. I told him my father is Finnish and my mother is from the United States, and that I lived in Asia for a few years when I was a teenager. Ahmed nodded in approval.

“You’ve seen a bit of the world,” he said. “Things are different over there, but really, when you visit other places you see that people are the same everywhere. We’re all just people.”

While ethnic labels helped to make sense of our interaction and they were acknowledged, Ahmed explicitly aligned himself with a cosmopolitan ethic that echoed the words of Kobe from The Amsterdam. This was another example of the conscious blurring of boundaries described in the previous chapter. Despite an initial distrust of my motives in approaching Halima and himself, Ahmed negotiated the encounter by establishing a common ground between us as locals. This common ground was furthermore reinforced by the social setting of Brussels, known as a place of social contact and conviviality between people of diverse backgrounds.

Soon we were joined by Halima and the rest of their friends. Some of them sat at our table while others played the fruit machines. Halima’s friends were Somali, and like Halima and Ali, they all spoke almost exclusively in Finnish with each other. Ahmed went out and I returned to reading the newspaper. It was still an early evening in Brussels and customers were slowly trickling in.

“How many people do you know that have been sent back to Somalia?” Halima asked a young man sitting at our table. He didn’t respond. “Well, I know quite a few,” she continued. “If you don’t work and if you’re not useful to society, you should be sent back.”

His eyelids moved very slowly, up and down. He was intoxicated, and likely did not fully comprehended what Halima was saying. I suspected he was probably mixing alcohol with something else.

“Do you agree?” Halima suddenly turned to me.

“Agree with what?” I asked and folded the newspaper that I was barely reading anyway. It was obvious I had been listening all along.

“If you’re not useful to society you shouldn’t be supported by the government. I’m talking about these kinds of people like this guy.”

She pointed directly at the man sitting opposite to her. He still wasn't responding.

"*Society doesn't owe you anything*," she said to him. "If you don't work, if you don't study, if you don't do anything useful, why should you be supported?"

I was taken aback by Halima's question. Here we were sitting in a pub in Kontula, a neighbourhood with a history of relatively high unemployment, after having just finished discussing racism and prejudice with Ahmed. Although it was a reasonable moral question about the relationship between society and the individual, it was also embedded in a stereotyping narrative of immigrants, especially Somalis, taking advantage of welfare and not working for a living. My impression was that Halima was aligning with this narrative, perhaps only situationally, to rebuke the young man and as a harsh word of advice to him. And perhaps Halima, still aware of my question concerning racism, wanted to illustrate that not all Somalis are alike, and thus the ethnic stereotypes are not valid. After all, she had already pointed out that she was working for a living. By aligning with the narrative and condemning unemployed Somalis, she distanced herself not only from the drunk man at the table but also from the stigma associated with her ethnicity. It was a negotiation of social worth.

Before I had time to form a response, we were interrupted by some commotion at the table next to ours. There was a tall young Somali man standing next to our table and he was aggravated over something Nadia's other friends had been discussing. He had a glass of beer in his hand that was spilling as he swung his arm in frustration.

"Do you understand that you'll never become Finnish! You become a citizen of Finland, but you can never become *a Finn*. Do you understand?!" he told them.

The bartender walked over and asked him to leave. The young man turned and towered over the bartender.

"I'm going to finish drinking this and then I'll leave. Do you understand! I'm going to finish drinking this!" he said to the bartender.

Nadia tried to de-escalate the situation. "Don't threaten that man. I can't accept threatening behaviour. He is *working* here."

The bartender allowed him to finish the drink if he would then leave. The situation calmed down, and soon the young man left the pub.

The afternoon described above left me with a strong impression of how the issues of ethnic boundaries, racism, and a sense of belonging are constantly simmering

underneath the surface of daily life at the shopping centre. These themes were consistently brought up in both interviews as well as regular conversations with people I met at the shopping centre. While belonging is grounded in social practices and engagement at the local level, it also remains in a referential relationship with nationalist narratives of belonging and social worth. This is especially true with ethnic minorities who find themselves often at odds with nationalist criterion of cultural membership (Haapajärvi, Juvenius & Junnilainen 2020). Continuing on the example of Somali Finns; in recent survey studies (Saukkonen 2020), the majority of Somali language speakers in the Helsinki metropolitan area said they experience belonging to Finnish society, yet it is much rarer for respondents to experience being culturally Finnish. Even while the majority of the Somali speaking respondents had been born in Finland or lived in Finland for a long time, over 90% of Somali speaking respondents identify culturally with their country of origin (*taustamaa*) rather than with Finland (ibid: 88-89).

Education, language proficiency, employment and political participation are important factors of integration to Finnish society (ibid), but in the context of urban marginalisation ethnic boundaries are exacerbated by other social processes of exclusion, such as poverty and low levels of education (Ojanen 2018). This experience of exclusion combined with a lack of identification with a Finnish national identity, therefore, led many of my informants to identify more strongly with the neighbourhood, rather than with Finland or even with Helsinki. This is a common theme found in other studies of Finnish housing estates (Tuominen 2020; Huttunen & Juntunen 2020). In this way ethnicity as well as urban marginalisation inform a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood. A sense of exclusion in other parts of society creates a stronger attachment to local social life and the physical spaces in the neighbourhood.

In the next section, we move to a different semi-public space at the shopping centre and examine to what extent is proximity and social contact significant to cosmopolitan formations.

5.4 People watching at the café

Many of the semi-public spaces where residents come into contact with difference are not as intimate and socially uninhibited as the pubs. A few residents I interviewed said they enjoy spending time in places where people congregate but as non-drinkers, they

avoid the local pubs. Some of the cafés at the shopping centre offer an alternative meeting place where it is possible to spend time among other residents without spending too much money. Some residents referred to particular cafés as their "safe space", where they felt most comfortable outside of their homes. Again, a sense of safety and security is something that ties closely to a sense of belonging. Cafés thus represent places of civility, where difference is recognised and acknowledged, but where negotiation and engagement of boundaries is less forthright and more subtle.

Above Kontula's underground metro station there is a large supermarket. Inside, next to the main entrance is a café. The café offers inexpensive filter coffee (€1.30) served in dark brown paper cups and a small selection of snacks and pastries. Adjacent to the café counter is the local mail delivery service point. The tables and chairs of the café are located at a separate alcove in the foyer of the supermarket. From the tables it is possible to observe customers walking in and out of the supermarket. There are three entrances to the foyer, two of which are visible from the tables. It is essentially a local people watching spot, where residents can sit down for a coffee in a warm and safe environment and observe the near constant bustle of people walking across the foyer.

The supermarket is well guarded by their private security personnel and "antisocial" behaviour is much less tolerated here than elsewhere in the shopping centre. In fact, it is very rare to see anyone intoxicated sit down at the café tables. This makes the café a more safe and accessible social space for residents who, for whatever reason, do not frequent the pubs. While a diversity of people regularly sit down at the café, the café is primarily characterised as a hangout spot for senior citizens. Some pensioners I talked to said they commute to Kontula from nearby neighbourhoods such as Mellunmäki and visit the café as a matter of daily routine.

The atmosphere at the café is typically calm and unrushed despite the constant stream of customers walking by from the checkout counters. People often spend extended periods of time at the café, reading newspapers, making phone calls, meeting friends, filling out sports betting coupons, or just watching people walk by. Some of the regulars form into small groups at particular times of the day, but the café is also notable for being a place where a very large proportion of people sit alone. They do so quite comfortably since it is so common. And since there is a limited number of tables at the café, it is normal for a newcomer to join a table already occupied by someone else and sit there without having to disturb or be disturbed by others. This proximity with strangers makes it natural to engage in small talk with others.

I was engaged in small talk nearly every time I sat down at the café, and there hardly existed any common denominator between the people who approached me, except that they had all arrived at the café alone and lived somewhere nearby. The neighbourhood itself was the most common topic of conversation, but people were surprisingly willing to talk about their own backgrounds and how they had ended up in Kontula. Through such encounters at the café I met local pensioners, taxi drivers, public employees, health care workers, educators and unemployed people. They were Finns, Russians, Somali, Congolese and Finnish Romani. In fact, while sitting at the café on a typical afternoon, one might easily hear four or five different languages spoken at different tables.

Below is an extract from my field diary that I wrote at the café on a Tuesday afternoon:

> *An elderly man picks up a newspaper laying on the table and begins reading it until he realises it's printed in Chinese characters. At the table next to mine there are four Finnish men who are having a loud and lively discussion about the latest political crisis in parliament: Antti Rinne has stepped down as prime minister. A group of school kids walk past them across the foyer, bags of candy in their hands. Two Somali men finish drinking their coffee and continue their way towards the central plaza. Sitting behind me is a young woman, who is speaking Russian to an older woman, perhaps her mother. Next to them a Central Asian looking man sits alone drinking coffee, until a Finnish man walks up to his table carrying a sugar doughnut on a small paper plate. The Finnish man makes an expression as if to ask if he may sit down at the table. The Asian man gestures with his hand, "Please, sit," and smiles. The two men observe each other with short glances every now and then. The foyer is well suited for people watching. Residents can sit down and observe the diversity around them in a public space. They can choose to sit alone quietly or engage others in small talk. There is a relaxed atmosphere. Here in the café, there is an opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds to observe and engage with cultural difference. They can choose to extend themselves and establish contact or they can choose to simply observe from a safe distance.*

Either way, they are sharing the same space and taking part in shared social practices.

(Revised fieldnotes, 3.12.2019)

Some residents I talked to at the café emphasised how they enjoy the cultural diversity around them. One Finnish woman on her sabbatical told me she has met several ethnically mixed couples at the café and that she is particularly impressed how the shopping centre seems to be such an inclusive place, despite Kontula being, "An area where poor people live." She was on her way to buy a dress for an event to celebrate the Dominican Republic's Independence Day. A Somali taxi driver I met at the café said he had recently moved to Kontula from northern Finland with his family, and that he was pleased with the diversity and the general liveliness of the shopping centre. However, he also recounted several racist incidents he had experienced recently in the neighbourhood and was worried about his kids having to face racist prejudice. A Congolese pensioner said he visits the café regularly but so far hasn't made any new friends there, although I did observe him chatting to other strangers on more than one occasion. While he typically sits at the café alone, he said he still enjoys spending time in public spaces where there are a lot of people around. He wishes more people would spend time socialising at the shopping centre instead of sitting alone at home watching television. These were just several examples of the kinds of people I met at the café during my fieldwork.

Yet, to what extent is the social contact at the café sufficient to sustain cosmopolitan conviviality in the neighbourhood, especially in a context where a number of residents continue to endure racial discrimination as an aspect of everyday life in public spaces? After all, even the café is no exception to the kind of ethnic boundary-making described in the previous sections, even though I observed it to be less open and explicit compared to the pubs and some other social spaces at the shopping centre. The café seems to provide relatively neutral grounds to which people of all kinds of backgrounds feel comfortable accessing. In other words, the café is not occupied by a particular ethnic or social group that claims and dominates the space, but instead the space is characterised by its ethnic diversity and civil behaviour.

Elijah Anderson describes such spaces as 'cosmopolitan canopies' (2011). Anderson introduced the concept to describe the way that particular urban spaces offer ordinary people on the street the opportunity to interact across racial and ethnic lines in

an otherwise racially segregated society. He spent several years observing public spaces, such as squares and markets, in Centre City Philadelphia. Anderson argues, that the casual time spent in these pluralistic spaces promotes a cultural basis for trust. In these cosmopolitan canopies that belong to everyone, people observe one another while engaging in urban sociability, thus learning to read the signs and symbols strangers display in order to make sense of the social and ethnic diversity around them. Anderson emphasises how cosmopolitan canopies are neutral social settings where 'people of diverse backgrounds feel they have an equal right to be there', and where cultural exchanges are quietly negotiated in a safe and civil environment (ibid: 278-9). Anderson views such urban spaces as important for 'social education' where ethnic stereotypes and prejudice may be tested through direct observation, providing an opportunity for people to develop new understandings of others who are different from themselves (ibid: 161). Cosmopolitan settings not only provide a more grounded knowledge of diversity and difference, but ultimately what happens under the canopy of civility may provide a model for social interaction in neighbourhoods across the city.

Anderson describes the kind of 'eye work' that takes place in the cosmopolitan canopies he observed in Philadelphia (ibid: 113). Busy public spaces with social diversity encourages people to be curious of strangers. Places where an ethos of civility reigns and it is safe to engage eye contact with others, people surreptitiously steal looks at each other only to look away hastily if they are discovered. Gawking at other people is against etiquette, unless it happens from a safe distance. The eye work I observed in the café was very similar, and people seemed to be respectful in the way they engaged in people watching. Being watched and being scrutinised are two very different things, and in the café, people seemed to be mindful of this. Too much attention is off-putting and may even be considered aggressive.

Another method of observing other people at the café was to listen to their conversations. This created at times situations where the person speaking was aware of the audience at another table and addressed things they said to this secondary audience. Goffman calls these adventitious listeners 'bystanders', who officially do not participate in the encounter but who might still follow the conversation closely (Goffman 1979: 8). According to Goffman, speakers will modify how they speak and what they say according to who is within their visual and aural range. For instance, one afternoon a middle-aged Finnish woman at the café was telling me about her best friend, who is an Afghani practical nurse living and working in Finland. She glanced over her shoulder to

the table next to ours and then raised her voice when she said, “She got a job as soon as she got here, and she wanted to learn the language.” The few older ethnic Finnish men who were listening to our conversation all looked away, but the woman made sure they heard what an exemplary immigrant her friend is. In this way, she was consciously participating in the local narrative about immigrants and asylum seekers by challenging the stereotypes she assumed the Finnish men had about immigrants in the neighbourhood. For that short moment, the conversation between the two of us was transformed into a negotiation of difference between her and the bystanders at the café.

The awareness that bystanders are listening to conversations is a common occurrence. The café creates a context in which residents are there to watch and listen to others just as much as they are there to be seen and heard. There is a performative aspect to sitting at the café, in being seen and overheard by strangers. In this way, there may exist a negotiation between people who do not necessarily ever directly exchange words with each other, and who nevertheless negotiate simply because they share the same space with each other. Goffman calls this underlying context the participant framework of a gathering. The reason I refer to Goffman’s theory of social encounters is to draw attention to the mechanisms that spaces such as the café provide for social contact and for opportunities to learn how to live with difference. Social encounters at the shopping centre thus take myriad forms, from the direct engagement and negotiations in the pubs, to quietly spending time people watching at the café. I argue that the opportunities to observe and engage with strangers provided by the safety and familiarity of the café, are essential to cosmopolitan formations and a shared experience of belonging.

5.5 Overcoming fear of the Other

It was a cloudy day with drizzle when I arrived at the shopping centre. I bought a coffee at the supermarket café and went to sit down in the foyer. I had my camera with me. There was an older Afro-Finnish man sitting alone at one of the tables and I joined him. We acknowledged each other with a smile but didn’t say anything. He was busy with a stack of bills, sorting them out on the table and scribbling notes with a blue point pen. I took out my camera and looked through the photographs I had taken the day before. He made a phone call to a mobile phone company about some missed payments. He spoke in Finnish, with a strong accent. Apart from us there were two Somali men sharing a

table with a Finnish man who was filling out a sports betting coupon. It was quieter than usual, most likely because of the weather. At the table next to ours there were two Asian men drinking coffee. I didn't recognise the language they spoke.

After some time, the man at my table asked me if I was a photographer. I said I'm just a hobbyist and showed him some photographs I had recently taken in different neighbourhoods around East Helsinki. He became excited when he saw a photograph of two wrestlers at a beach wrestling competition in Vuosaari, a neighbourhood south-east of Kontula. He told me he is a judo black belt who used to coach and referee competitions in the Congo. With our shared interest in martial arts, we began talking and conversed much of the afternoon.

His name was Elombe. I told him about my research, and we talked about Kontula and about how things in the neighbourhood have changed over the past 20 years. Elombe came to Finland as a refugee in the mid-1990s. He said Kontula used to be dangerous, and that there used to be a lot more drunk people in public spaces. Our conversation then turned to drug use at the shopping centre, as they often did in conversations about Kontula, although I had the feeling that I was more drawn to the topic than he was. Elombe didn't seem to be too bothered by the local drug users. In fact, Elombe told me he sometimes goes to the local low-threshold service centre Symppis for porridge and coffee in the mornings. The services at Symppis are primarily geared towards the needs of drug addicts and it is currently not very common for other residents to visit there. Elombe said he thinks many local residents are scared of Symppis because sometimes the people who gather outside the doors are loud and intoxicated. He also noted that the entrance is not very open or inviting because the windows are covered. I then asked Elombe if he was ever afraid of the drug users when he visits Symppis.

"Why should I?" he said. "It's life. You shouldn't be afraid of life. You shouldn't hold on to fear." He placed his open palm over his heart. "If someone starts a problem and wants to fight, I can ask the guard to help in that situation. I mind my own business, so nobody bothers me."

Elombe's response to my question captured an attitude that I found echoed in the thoughts of several other residents I interviewed. A willingness to engage with difference at the shopping centre – whether that difference is marked by ethnic or some other social label or characteristic – is predicated by a willingness to grant others equal right of presence. Elombe didn't experience fear of drug users partly because he

accepted that individuals encountered in Symppis were simply part of local life and not something that needed to be avoided. In other words, Elombe did not allow the stigma and fear associated with drug users to dictate the way he navigated the shopping centre.

Some residents I interviewed said that the familiarity with negotiating difference brought out particular qualities in local residents. Ali, who I introduced in the previous chapter, said this about local people:

"It's the attitude. You can recognise a person from Kontula from their attitude. Someone who has lived in Kontula for a long time is easy going and doesn't get scared easily, doesn't get the jitters easily. Because, you know, the neighbourhood has a bad reputation, and if you survive in Kontula, you can survive anywhere. In Finland though, I wouldn't send you to Compton! [laughs]"

According to Ali, familiarity with the daily life of a "bad" neighbourhood conditions people to be more relaxed in their everyday encounters with strangers. Learning how to negotiate social and cultural difference in a neighbourhood where marginalised individuals and groups actively take part in local life engenders a kind of social flexibility. Ali sees this as a positive attribute of local residents.

In other interviews several residents described how they felt when they first move into the neighbourhood as adults, and how the shopping centre initially forced them out of their "comfort zone". They described a mix of apprehension and curiosity when first getting to know the shopping centre area. One Finnish man said he made a conscious decision to go towards what frightened him and to confront the kinds of people he normally avoided. He said he believes that any kind of person can find their place in Kontula if they are themselves willing to tolerate local imperfections and confront difference in others. "Kontula is a pluralistic place," he said.

Getting along with others who are markedly different from oneself, therefore, requires one to overcome the fears and anxieties of facing the unfamiliar. Certainly not all fears experienced at the shopping centre are unfounded, as violence and crime pose a real threat in public spaces, but through a degree of familiarity the experience of fear is less based on prejudice and ignorance. In an environment where residents learn to negotiate prejudice and stigma in shared urban spaces, the capacity to give 'a positive status to differences' rather than the achievement of community consensus becomes the basis of urban civility (Mouffe 2000: 19). Overcoming the instincts to avoid and exclude become the prerequisite of an open and convivial society.

6. Conclusions

This master's thesis has aimed to answer the question, "How do residents from diverse social and cultural backgrounds negotiate difference in Kontula?" In order to answer this question, I have analysed ethnographic data gathered in Kontula's shopping centre and explored the processes which inform local social interaction. In this concluding chapter I summarise my ethnographic findings and address the following secondary research questions regarding everyday urban encounters at Kontula's shopping centre – namely:

(1) How does urban marginalisation inform a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood?
(2) To what extent is everyday social contact at the shopping centre significant to cosmopolitan formations?

In the following sub-chapters I answer these questions respectively.

6.1 Urban marginalisation and landscapes of belonging

As a neighbourhood with a history of territorial stigmatisation, narratives about Kontula have centred around its social problems. Residents are aware of the ways in which the neighbourhood is regularly subjected to symbolic exaggeration, and this informs the manner in which they narrate their own experience of the neighbourhood and the way they interact with other residents. While most of my research informants emphasised how Kontula is like any other residential neighbourhood in Helsinki, the shopping centre is perceived by many as a place where problems related to drugs, alcohol and unsafety seem to cluster, thus giving the neighbourhood a bad reputation. Some residents also believe the growing number of immigrants exacerbates existing social problems in the neighbourhood. The shopping centre is thus a place where residents come into social contact and mix with a diversity of people from different backgrounds and lifestyles, and where social and cultural difference is negotiated in everyday encounters. Particular semi-public spaces, such as The Amsterdam, evoke at times contradictory meanings among residents, revealing both historical and current processes of social marginalisation and stigma within the context of a socially mixed and multi-

ethnic neighbourhood in the margins of Helsinki. The Amsterdam represents a space of fear and avoidance as well as a space of familiarity and belonging.

Social and ethnic boundaries emerge in everyday interactions and are evident in the way categories of "us" and "them" are used to describe the social landscape and in the way some residents physically distance themselves from particular groups of people in public spaces. Drug users, especially members of ethnic minorities, are often feared and avoided in public spaces. While some residents choose to avoid and distance themselves from urban spaces and situations in which they may need to confront stigmatised individuals, other residents actively participate in the semi-public spaces of the shopping centre where there is an opportunity to observe and interact with people from different social and ethnic backgrounds. These differing perspectives informed the approach taken in this study. As the research question was concerned with ways residents negotiate difference, and thus implies a level of social interaction between differing groups, this study focused on the perspectives of those residents who actively participate in local social scenes.

Within the context of everyday forms of racism and discrimination often experienced by ethnic minorities in public spaces of the city, the shopping centre offers a relatively safe and inclusive space to participate and engage in urban life. The convergence of different marginalised groups at the shopping centre creates an environment in which marginalised individuals feel "at home" and where they can be themselves without being scrutinised by others. Particular pubs and cafés constitute spaces of belonging, where through habitual engagement and shared social practices local residents form new alliances that re-configure categories of "us" and "them". The blurring of ethnic boundaries through everyday interaction at the shopping centre thus provides the basis for a cosmopolitan urban sociability. Marginalised groups and individuals therefore negotiate prejudice by occupying and participating in public spaces and thus expanding local meanings of who belongs. This challenges the processes and discourses that constitute them as objects of fear and nuisance. A sense of belonging in the neighbourhood is thus informed by experiences of social exclusion and marginalisation elsewhere in the city.

6.2 Urban sociability and cosmopolitan publics

The capacity to live with difference is enabled by ordinary meeting places, such as pubs and cafés, where residents come into regular social contact and engage with diverse individuals and groups. By examining the minutiae of everyday social interaction, I have analysed what it means to negotiate difference in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood. I observed how spaces such as Café Pub Brussels are the sites of informal engagement and conviviality across social and ethnic boundaries. While conviviality refers to a degree of cultural familiarity and even social cohesion among heterogenous groups of people, it also accommodates moments of dissonance which an everyday engagement of difference ultimately entails. Confirming the findings in previous research, conviviality in Kontula does not imply the absence of racism or conflict, but rather it describes the ways in which residents learn the cultural skills required to negotiate moments of dissonance. Everyday contact between people of diverse backgrounds thus offers an opportunity for conviviality but does not guarantee it. The capacity to accommodate tension and transgressions rather than the achievement of community consensus is therefore crucial to the formation of cosmopolitan publics.

Social contact in the public spaces of the neighbourhood ultimate reveal that the negotiation of difference is, in fact, a continual process of social adaptation, in which conviviality and conflict are ever present characteristics of a plural society. Furthermore, while belonging in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood is grounded in social practices and engagement at the local level, it also remains in a referential relationship with nationalist narratives of belonging and social worth. While a nationalist criterion of cultural membership can be perceived as exclusionary and used to construct ethnic boundaries, local forms of belonging in the neighbourhood are more inclusive. This also confirms findings found in other studies of suburban housing estates in Finland.

This thesis discussed how conviviality and a degree of cultural familiarity in a socially mixed and multi-ethnic neighbourhood is also dependent on more neutral social settings where a diversity of people feel they have equal right to belong. These cosmopolitan canopies, such as the café described in chapter 5, offer residents an open and safe space in which to engage with strangers from diverse backgrounds, whether directly through small talk, or through passive observation. Indirect interaction with others while spending time in shared spaces and taking part in people watching, forms an important aspect of living with difference. It provides residents with the opportunity

to observe and develop new understandings of others who are different from themselves.

The everyday social contact in Kontula often requires residents to overcome fears and anxieties of facing the unfamiliar. Based on the insights of my research participants as well as observations I made of residents who spent time socialising at the shopping centre, it seems that the ability to negotiate difference is predicated by a willingness to engage with the Other and overcome the instincts to avoid and exclude in everyday encounters. The cosmopolitan openness to engage with divergent cultural experiences and the capacity to tolerate contrasts and difference are evident in the social flexibility of many local residents. The shopping centre is therefore an agonistic public space as a diversity of people experience an equal right to claim and negotiate a sense of belonging. This active negotiation of difference in everyday urban encounters is thus the hallmark of the neighbourhood's capacity to live with difference.

6.3 So what does all this have to do with urban planning?

This thesis contributes to previous research of suburban housing estates by providing an ethnographic account of everyday social encounters in the context of a socially mixed and multi-ethnic neighbourhood in East Helsinki. The study illustrates how despite processes of urban marginalisation and territorial stigmatisation, many residents in Kontula experience a keen sense of belonging and attachment to the shared urban spaces of the shopping centre. The shopping centre furthermore provides a space of belonging for urban populations that are most vulnerable to processes of exclusion and marginalisation elsewhere in the city. These observations provide a grass-roots level understanding of how residents respond to social change and how local places integrate new populations. This perspective supplements a discussion about residential segregation and social differentiation in Helsinki. The key point is that residents are actively engaged in negotiating local social challenges and cultural change and are not merely passive subjects of social and economic forces.

One of the key strategic goals of the city of Helsinki is to prevent residential segregation. While residential segregation is primarily understood as the concentration of the urban poor in particular areas of the city, there is a growing concern over immigrant populations concentrating in these same residential areas. What is feared is that these populations do not integrate into Finnish society and that there is lessened

social interaction between immigrants and native Finns. This study contributes to the discussion by suggesting that the concentration of so-called immigrant populations and the multicultural commercial activity in Kontula may, in fact, contribute to interaction between these population groups. Rather than suggesting ethnic segregation, there is evidence of considerable social engagement. The study suggests, that as a result of the gradual integration of immigrant populations to the local commercial and social life, the shopping centre in Kontula has over time become a more inclusive and tolerant place of social and cultural diversity. The study also highlights the ways in which informal spaces of encounter facilitate integration into the social life of the neighbourhood.

Based on these findings, future studies could investigate what consequences does the renovation of the shopping centre in Kontula have for social interaction and community engagement in the neighbourhood. Future studies could also compare how urban spaces in other parts of the city enable social interaction across social and ethnic boundaries. How do more affluent neighbourhoods in Helsinki accommodate social and cultural diversity? What other types of urban spaces and social activities facilitate the negotiation of social and cultural difference?

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